STAR TREK
THE NEXT GENERATION®

ROLEPLAYING GAME

NARRATOR'S GUIDE

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Dedication: To the finest group of people I've had the pleasure to work with—Christian Moore, Owen Seyler, Matt Colville, Charles Ryan, Kenneth Hite, Steve Long, Inman Young, and Jay Longino. When historians look back on this day, they'll say "never before has such a group of heroes strode the land. It was an Age of Legend!"

Special Thanks to Alessandra Isaacs and Christian Moore, both of whom never get thanked enough.

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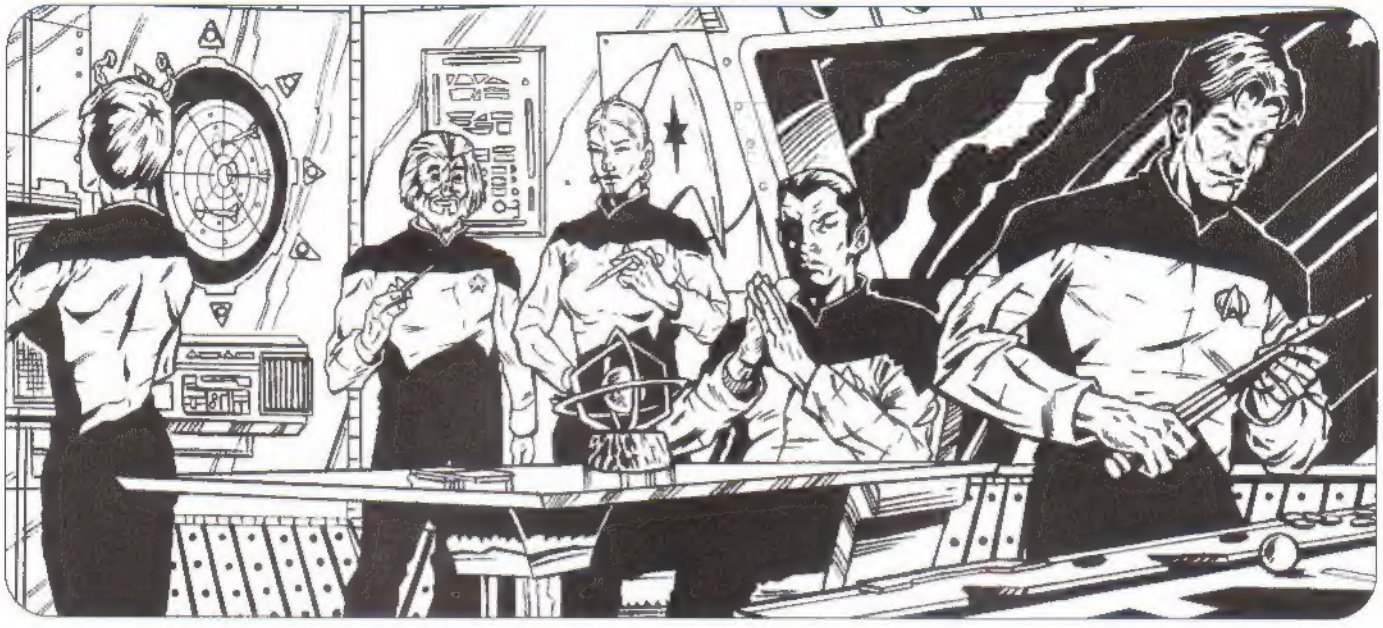
The Academy Series

Setting a *Star Trek* series at Starfleet Academy offers certain opportunities to the Narrator and players. It also involves certain limitations and differences in style from a standard *Star Trek* series. This chapter looks at these differences and provides advice for the Narrator on how best to deal with them.

Character Creation

Players and Narrators should consult "Chapter Seven" of the *Starfleet Academy Handbook* for rules on creating Academy cadet characters.

The important thing to keep in mind about cadet characters is that they're not really finished yet. They are at the beginning of their Starfleet careers, so they are correspondingly less capable then experienced Starfleet officers; cadets start out with only the most basic skills. They aren't proficient in warp drive engineering, phaser use, or any of the skills taken for granted in your typical *ST:TNG* RPG series. That's why they're at the Academy in the first place. Cadets are also likely to have more personal flaws, since turning rough recruits into polished officers is part of the Academy experience. Narrators should keep these limitations in mind when creating challenges for cadets.



THE PERSONALITY ARCHETYPE

To give cadets a bit of an edge, the rules provide an additional 5 Development Points to spend on the Personality Archetype. This consists of two separate halves—the Aspect and the Focus. When combined, these present a near-endless combination of personality types. The player should think about his character's outlook on life, his perspective on the universe. Is he like Geordi La Forge? Then he might be an Ingenious Experimenter. Is he like Worf? Then perhaps Tireless Defender or Disciplined Fighter might best describe him. Ask each player to describe the type of character he wants to portray—not the species and profession, but how he'd react to certain stock situations—first contact with a new civilization, an enigmatic alien device, a standoff with a Ferengi DaiMon. Then find the Aspect and Focus that best describes this point of view.

Some players will choose an extreme personality, like Maverick Rebel or Brash Fighter. This could cause some "interesting" roleplaying situations as the player focuses on the extreme behavior. In these cases, if you think a personality combination will interfere with everyone's enjoyment, simply ask the player to reconsider his choice. Talk to him about his choice and try to understand his rationale. He might be making his decision based on the combination of traits it allows (never a good idea), or he might have a character concept inappropriate for Starfleet (in which case his goal might be to overcome his foibles).

Try to encourage your players to spend as many of those points as they can on extra skills—they're going to need 'em. Ask them to consider their childhood interests when spending these DP. A Humanist might have studied alien cultures or Earth's greatest philosophers in his free time. An Experimenter could have spent her early years reading engineering journals and tinkering in her backyard. A Survivor could have picked up skills necessary for his survival. These skills in particular should represent the character's abiding interest in a subject, something that will stay with him throughout his life. Narrators who prefer to omit this new system can simply provide players with five extra Development Points, perhaps to spend during the Early Life stage of Background development.

Players have the option of spending their Personality Archetype DP on advantages and disadvantages. Note that cadets shouldn't have more than 8 points worth of disadvantages. Otherwise they would never have passed the strenuous, and rigorous, Academy entrance examinations.

Always keep in mind that the Personality Archetype is a rough guideline for a character's behavior. Don't force the player to react a particular way—your way—because that's what

the Personality Archetype says. Not every Inquisitive Experimenter ceaselessly reacts with curiosity, nor is every Brash Leader continually rushing headlong into danger. People (whether human, Vulcan, or Ferengi) exhibit a range of emotions and respond in their own ways. Conversely, encourage your players to act with variety, especially if you notice them playing a cliché. Notice how Captain Picard could be described as a Nurturing Humanist, an Inquisitive Explorer, a Calm Leader, and a Tireless Mediator; he's all these things, and more. That's because his behavior depends on the situation—he's a leader when he needs to be, an explorer when confronted with something new—but one personality remains dominant (we leave it to you to decide which one).

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

With a Starfleet Academy series, players get a true sense of their characters' growth and development. They start out with only a few abilities. As they progress, they develop the skills their characters need for their Starfleet careers. These are the experiences to which Starfleet officers often refer, their formative years where they experienced love, fear, or responsibility for the first time. Running characters through even a short Academy series—only two or three sessions—can give them a great deal more depth and background by the time they graduate.

Experience Points

When running an Academy series, the Narrator should be aware of the issue of Experience Point awards and their expenditure. The *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* rulebook suggests awarding from 1 to 3 Experience Points to each character per episode. But looking at the Experience Point Costs table on page 179 of the *ST: TNG RPG* rulebook reveals a problem. Experience Points have a variable value—the higher your skill level, the more Experience Points it takes to go to the next level. Raising Energy Weapon from 2 to 3, for example, costs 3 Experience Points; to increase this skill to 4 costs 4 Experience Points. In an Academy series, Narrators should instead award Development Points, because their value remains "stable." Each skill level costs the same amount of Development Points: 3.

Because Development Points are "worth more" than Experience Points, you should award them sparingly—one or two points per episode. Even this moderate level of experience can quickly lead to characters more capable than Starfleet officers created using the core rulebook. If you're planning on narrating a long-term Academy series, you should keep your DP awards low, no more than one per episode. For more advice, see the *Starfleet Academy Handbook*, "Chapter Seven," page 114.

Of course Narrators have the option of simply ignoring any incongruities in the cadets' skill accumulation. After all, the player characters in a series are supposed to be extraordinary compared to their fellow cadets and officers, so if they come out of the Academy with a few more skills than a generic starting character, that isn't necessarily a problem (though you should keep it in mind if someone creates a character using the core rules).

One way Narrators can control the accumulation of Development Points is to vary the time between episodes. While interesting things happen to cadets, rather than following the weekly exploits of an intrepid Starfleet crew, your series could drop in on the cadets once every few months. If the typical *ST:TNG RPG* campaign is like a television series, then an Academy campaign could be compared to a miniseries. For example, the Narrator could rule that each semester at the Academy includes only four episodes, for eight episodes per year, resulting in a total of thirty-two episodes over the course of the cadets' four years on Earth. (See page 114 of the *Starfleet Academy Handbook*). (On the other hand, you might play only one episode per semester, resulting in eight episodes over the course of the cadets' four years at the Academy; then you might want to give each player 8 Development Points per episode.)

Increasing the time between episodes makes it more difficult for them to continue from one to another. You can't pick up where you left off the previous week, something many groups like to do. In this case, stories

need to be fairly self-contained, although subplots and supporting cast members can certainly carry over from one episode to the next. This format is best suited for a short-term Academy series where you intend the cadets eventually to "graduate" to regular Starfleet service.

Classes and Required Skills

Narrators can control where the players spend their experience points by requiring them to purchase the basic skills for their Starfleet Overlay before spending any remaining points on other skills or advantages. A player who intends to become a starship doctor had better have skills required for the job. If, for some reason, the cadet's final skill numbers upon graduation are not the same as that on the Overlay, don't worry about it. The difference between having Computer 2 (3) and Computer 1 (2) is not worth quibbling over; that person simply chose to concentrate in other areas. As a general rule of thumb, a cadet needs to purchase two to three skill ranks per semester in order to acquire all of the necessary skills to fill out the Starfleet Overlay, with more opportunities to take "elective" skills in the cadet's junior and senior years.

When it comes to allocating Development Points, the Narrator should consult page 114 of the *Academy Handbook*. Encourage players to spend their points according to their year at the Academy. Remember, you have to walk before you can run, so players should buy "basic" skills before advanced. For added fun and realism, ask the players to choose their courses for the semester using the Academy Curriculum chapter, based, again, on their year at the Academy. Have them spend their Development Points based on their class schedule. The classes relate to skills depending on the player's desires and common sense. For example, if a player chooses Introduction to Warp Theory (PRE 301), he can spend 3 DP for the Propulsion Engineering (Warp Drive) skill, while Sociology classes would result in a Social Sciences (Sociology) skill. On the other hand, the course Starfleet Skills II (STAR 102) might translate into either Energy Weapon (Phaser), First Aid, or Personal Equipment (Tricorder). Taking a course in Federation Law (POLT 105) would not allow a player to spend DPs on the History (Klingon) skill. The Narrator is the final arbiter on how a class translates into a particular skill.

Advantages

Some advantages can be acquired through study and training, and the Academy certainly provides cadets with plenty of opportunities. Cadets can purchase nearly any advantage that does not require a particular heritage or background (like Alien Upbringing or Mixed Species Heritage), or a particular biology (like Night Vision or Rapid Healing). The Narrator should require a cadet character to undergo some sort of special training to explain the new advantage, such as learning Alertness as a result of security training, or Quick-draw on the phaser range. "Social" advantages, such as Patron or Ally, can easily be justified. In some cases, the Narrator may choose to give a character a particular advantage, such as Commendation, Favor Owed, or Promotion, in lieu of any experience award for the episode. See the "Commendations" section for more information.

Disadvantages

Another place where cadets can spend earned development points is in buying off various disadvantages. Cadets going into Starfleet Academy are not as polished and professional as full-fledged Starfleet officers. They may have various disadvantages they need to "buy off" as part of the process of their education. Some of these disadvantages may include things like Argumentative, Arrogant, Impulsive, Intolerant, Obsessive Tendencies, Phobia, or Weak Will. It may also include disadvantages related to the cadet's pre-Academy life, like Dark Secret, Dependents, or Obligations. Generally speaking, the Academy won't accept students with certain disadvantages, like Bloodlust, Fanatic, crippling Phobias, Medical Problems, or Physical Impairments, unless they can be treated in some way, in which case they're no longer disadvantages.

Eliminating a particular disadvantage can form the basis of an entire episode or be an ongoing subplot for a cadet character. For example, an Intolerant character has to learn tolerance at the Academy or risk being expelled. A cadet with a Dark Secret must choose whether to keep the secret in order to graduate, or tell the truth and risk censure or even expulsion. Similarly, the Narrator could allow a player to select an extreme disadvantage and get into the Academy, making for a powerful story of inner conflict; as the cadet's Bloodlust becomes apparent over the course of the series, he will either have to overcome his foible or leave the Academy.

Some cultural disadvantages may also have to be bought off, or at least reduced, in order for a cadet to follow Starfleet rules and regulations. A Ferengi cadet, for example, may need to buy off his species tendency toward being Greedy. A Klingon cadet who has both Bloodlust and Vengeful may have problems dealing with Academy regulations, to say nothing of the occasional pranks cadets play on each other. While Starfleet honors the cultural heritages of all species, it also expects its officers to adhere to its rules and regulations.

Cadets may also gain certain disadvantages during their time at the Academy, although Starfleet would not consider all of them as such. For example, many cadets develop a Code of Honor during their Academy days, such as the Starfleet Code, the Hippocratic Oath, or some similar Code. Cadets may acquire other disadvantages. Involvement with other cadets can lead to Dark Secrets, Obligations, or Rivals. Training accidents might lead to Medical Problems or Physical Impairments, although this is rare, given the safety checks and the quality of Starfleet medical facilities. Excellence in Academy programs can make some cadets Arrogant or Argumentative.

If the Narrator allows it, disadvantages acquired by characters in play can give them additional Development Points, either to offset the cost of advantages they acquire or to help them purchase additional required skills or even new edges. Narrators should carefully consider any new abilities a player wishes to purchase to ensure they fit the character concept. Narrators can also declare that cadets gain no Development Points for disadvantages gained during play, as with regular characters.

Courage

Narrators may, instead of awarding Development Points, choose to award cadets with Courage Points to reflect the boost in courage cadets get from their training at the Academy. This may allow cadets to graduate with more Courage Points than the average starting character, or the Narrator can reduce the number of Courage Points cadets graduate with to 1 or even 0. Cadets must then earn the same level of Courage possessed by a Starfleet officer, then gain additional courage afterward.

Renown

Starfleet cadets who manage to achieve great things can earn Renown for their actions, much the same as Starfleet officers. While few cadets become famous (or infamous) before beginning their careers as officers, Captains Kirk and Picard both had memorable, and pivotal, experiences during their days as cadets. To simulate this, Narrators may wish to award cadets with Renown normally, including benefits for commendations the cadets might earn. When a cadet graduates, reduce all of the cadet's Renown aspects to 0 except for the highest absolute Aspect. This is what the cadet is remembered and known for by other officers in Starfleet.

For example, Ensign Foley participated in the discovery of a new lifeform while he attended the Academy, earning him a Skill Renown of 8, his highest Aspect. When Foley graduates, he retains this Renown, but sets his other Aspects to 0. On the other hand, Ensign Seatal took part in an incident at the Academy that earned her a Discipline Renown of –8, which is her highest absolute Aspect. When Seatal graduates, all anyone seems to remember is that she disobeyed orders, not that she was a good student. She has to work hard to prove herself.

Narrators can choose to allow cadets to keep all the Renown they earn at the Academy, but this can lead to some pretty famous cadets,

unless the Narrator keeps careful control over the Renown awards. Keep in mind that the player characters are supposed to be extraordinary, however, so a high Renown score is not completely unbelievable for them, especially since they should have accomplished some great things during their Academy days!

Commendations

It's possible for Starfleet cadets to earn commendations during their time at the Academy. While it is unlikely (but still possible) for cadets to win such major Starfleet commendations at the Medal of Honor or the Grankite Order of Tactics, it is fairly common for cadets to be awarded lesser commendations for their achievements at the Academy. Such honors are entered into the cadet's records and sometimes accompanied by a physical certificate or other trophy. Commendations also come with Renown Points, which reflect the increase in the cadet's reputation for the commendation. Page 25 of the *Starfleet Academy Handbook*, "Chapter Two," has more information about Starfleet Commendations cadets can earn and their Renown point values.

Demerits

Starfleet Academy uses a system of demerits and reprimands to discipline cadets who violate the Academy Code of Conduct and Starfleet regulations. Demerits warrant negative Renown assigned to the cadet (unless it's the Aggression Aspect, in which case the award should be positive), usually in the area of Discipline, although the demerits may affect other areas, depending on what the cadet did to earn them. For example, a cadet who was assigned demerits because of dereliction of duty might also gain negative Skill Renown. Cadets who earn demerits have to work hard to overcome them, gaining enough positive Renown to wipe them out. A Cadet with negative Discipline Renown will have a difficult time graduating from the Academy. See "Chapter Two" of the *Starfleet Academy Handbook* for more information about the demerit system and how it is used.

Graduation

Graduation generally means the end of a Starfleet Academy series and should be treated as a suitably momentous event. The Narrator can plan a special episode for the series' conclusion involving the cadets' graduation ceremonies and their becoming full-fledged Starfleet officers. See "Chapter Two" of the *Starfleet Academy Handbook* (page 25) for information about the Academy's graduation ceremonies and some ideas for running graduation episodes. You could even use the diploma included in the box, filling it out with the cadet's name.

It's a foregone conclusion that cadet characters will eventually graduate the Academy, unless the Narrator has a very different sort of series in mind. Even cadets who have been mavericks during their time at the Academy should be given a fair chance to graduate in the end. Graduation provides a sense of closure and completeness to the series.

Of course, Narrators can make use of the graduation ceremonies in an Academy series without having to end the series. A new class graduates from the Academy every year, so cadets will see at least three graduations before their own. Cadet characters can be involved in the graduation of upperclassmen, friends, or even rivals. They can be selected to deliver an address from their class or to take part in the graduation ceremonies in some

THE CADET CRUISE

After graduation, cadets can look forward to their cadet cruise and further adventures on board a starship. This is a period where cadets put their skills to the test and learn the practical applications of all they learned at the Academy. Taking tricorder readings in the classroom, or repairing a mock-up warp drive, is very different from scanning a new (and potentially dangerous) planet, or fixing a "live" warp core. It would be rare for Starfleet to keep a group of cadets together during this time, or afterward, making further adventures difficult; the player character group would be spread to the four winds.

If you plan to continue with the same group of characters, you could always skip over the cadet cruise and regroup the characters for their first official posting. Or you could play one episode focusing on everyone's cadet cruise, jump-cutting from character to character. Alternatively, everyone might end up on the same ship or base after all—the player characters are the stars of the show.

other way, such as part of an aerial demo team, the Academy band, or some other display or entertainment for the graduation guests.

Cadets can become involved in different plots based around graduation. In addition to all the possibilities posed by a gathering of Starfleet and Federation VIP's, there are plots involving the graduation itself and the cadets' fellow students. What if the cadets discover evidence that a member of the graduating class cheated on a final exam and should not graduate? Do they expose this person, even though he is otherwise an outstanding cadet and will likely be an excellent officer?

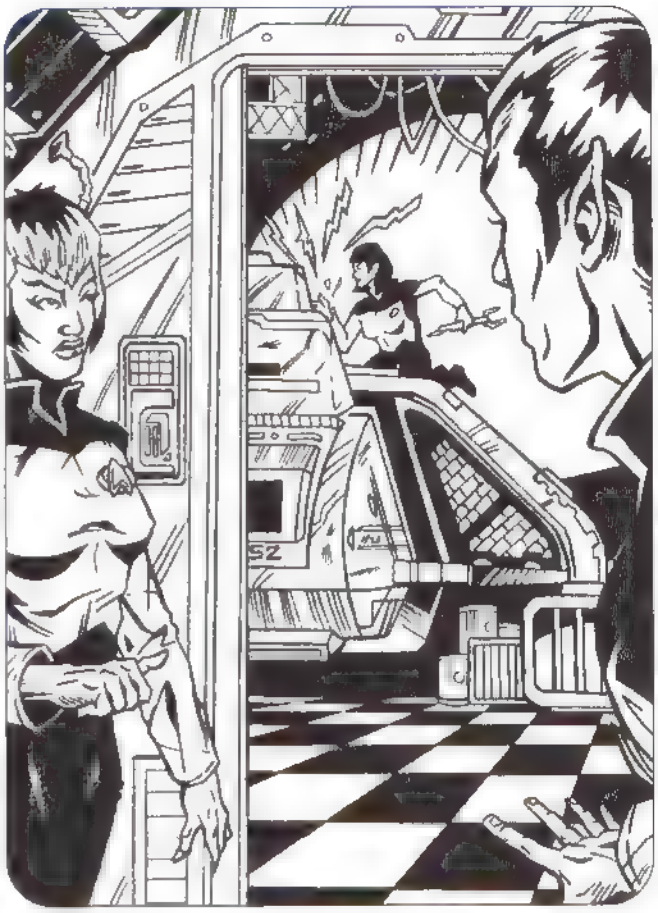
AXIOMS OF AN ACADEMY SERIES

In addition to the axioms found in all *Star Trek* series (*Star Trek: TNG* rulebook, page 162), certain rules describe the types of stories that fit into an Academy series. Most Academy adventures should share these axioms, to one degree or another. They are the foundation upon which the themes of the stories are built.

Limited Time

An Academy series has a limited time span. Barring unusual circumstances, cadets are at the Academy for only four years. Of course, this is plenty of time for a very detailed series to take place, but Narrators must keep in mind the Academy series ends when the cadets graduate, perhaps moving on to a regular *Star Trek* series aboard a starship or starbase. The Narrator can stretch the series by encouraging the cadets to pursue postgraduate work at one of the Advanced Schools, or by requiring cadets to repeat an academic year as punishment for some infraction—but even then the series still has a very definite end-point.

Another factor involving time is the cadets' schedule of classes and other activities. Starfleet Academy keeps cadets busy, and the Narrator must keep in mind that cadets must attend to regular duties just as Starfleet officers do. Fortunately, classes can provide backdrops for different scenes or even ideas for whole stories, like an episode based around a test for a particular class the cadets attend. Episodes



can also center on what cadets do in their limited free time.

Up to the Challenge

Cadets might seem less competent and capable player characters at first, but only when compared to experienced Starfleet officers. Keep in mind Starfleet cadets must undergo a lot of testing and training just to gain admission to the Academy. Although some cadets wash out, generally speaking Starfleet cadets are a cut above the rest. They have at least the potential to handle whatever challenges life may throw at them, or they wouldn't be at the Academy in the first place. Learning to use that potential is part of their Academy experience.

Cadets tend to have more rough edges than full-fledged Starfleet officers. They might have more personality-related Disadvantages and quirks to overcome. They're still young and still learning, and part of learning is making mistakes. Cadets don't always handle things as

well as they should, and they don't always do the right thing. The important thing is that they try to do the right thing and apply themselves to handling their own problems. Academy cadets aren't quitters. They shouldn't be willing to give up easily. Cadets also tend to be go-getters, filled with drive and ambition to get things done and impress their superior officers.

Personal Responsibility

Take the following situation: A group of cadets discovers evidence a Romulan spy who has infiltrated the Academy. They take their evidence to Academy Security, which arrests the spy. The Academy is safe once again.

Not much of a story, is it? That's because the cadets didn't really have to deal with the spy themselves; the authorities did it for them. A key element of an Academy series is that the cadets are the stars of the show. The adults the cadets work with sometimes become too involved in their own research, avoid acting on incomplete facts from cadets, or leave challenges up to the cadets to solve. The cadets go to Security with their evidence and Security dismisses their suspicions as baseless. Or the spy escapes and security can't find him, but the cadets think they know his hiding place. Or perhaps the spy poses as a security officer himself! In any case, always find a reason why the cadets can't simply run and get help from the nearest adult authority figure to solve all their problems.

By the same token, cadets should take responsibility for their actions. If they witness something that poses a threat to the Academy, Starfleet, the Federation, or even just a fellow cadet or innocent civilians, whether or not it's their fault, the cadets should try to do something about it. Starfleet doesn't teach its officers to stand around in the middle of a crisis. The cadets should often find themselves in situations where they are the only ones who can handle the problem at hand—someone makes them confront the problem (as in the case of a test), they're the only ones around, or no one in authority believes in the danger they perceive.

Sometimes cadets choose not to involve adult authority figures for other reasons, like covering up their own mistakes. Take Wesley Crusher trying to deal with the rogue nanites he created in the *Next Generation* episode "Evolution." Wes tried to solve the problem himself before he revealed it to anyone else. In cases like these, the cadets should learn to own up to their mistakes and take responsibility for their actions. Even when the adult authorities realize the problem, the cadets should clean up their own mess.

The Starfleet Code

The Academy Code of Conduct is more than just words—it is the principle Starfleet expects all cadets to live by and honor. The Academy tries to instill the values of truth, loyalty, honor, and duty into all cadets to make them better officers. Stories in an Academy series should give cadets chances to learn the value of these qualities, and to put them into action. For example, in the *Next Generation* episode "The First Duty," a group of cadets became involved in an illegal activity that resulted in the death of one of their squad members. They tried to cover up their involvement. They struggled between doing what was right and what they thought they needed to do to protect themselves and their careers. The episode illustrated the importance of telling the truth.

The Narrator doesn't have to have a heavy-handed moral for each episode, but some episodes should highlight Starfleet values and offer the cadets some choices involving those values. Which is more important, loyalty to the squad or telling the truth? Does duty to the Federation outweigh duty to one's own family or homeworld? Are personal achievement and recognition more important than being part of a team? These are all good questions to answer in an Academy series.

Lessons Learned

Cadets attend Starfleet Academy to learn—not just academic theory, but to how to be Starfleet officers. Stories in an Academy series should help teach cadets something in the end, either an academic skill they need or a lesson in what it means to serve as a member of Starfleet. Sometimes the lessons are great

personal achievements, and other times they are harsh lessons in life, but the players should come away from the episode feeling as though their characters learned something.

Don't stress this particular axiom too much. Stories with heavy-handed morals can become dull and predictable. Simply keep in mind that the cadets should come out of the story a little bit wiser than they went in.

SERIES FORMATS

Narrators can create and run many different types of series based around Starfleet Academy. The most common is a series based around a group of Starfleet cadets, but it is also possible to run an Academy series involving full-fledged officers.

Academy Cadets

In this standard type of Academy series, the players take the roles of cadets at the Academy. Episodes focus on the cadets' adventures as they learn to become Starfleet officers. This series makes use of the various axioms mentioned in the previous section.

The Narrator can begin the series at any point during the cadets' Academy attendance. The Academy Preparatory Program or the Academy Entrance Examinations afford good places to start such a series. These events provide opportunities to test the cadets' personal characters, reveal some things about their personalities, and allow them to get to know each other. They may serve as a prologue for the beginning of the series, before the cadets even arrive at the Academy. This approach also allows players to learn about Starfleet Academy at the same time as their characters. During the episodes they are introduced to the Academy campus, the regulations, and their instructors and fellow cadets. The Narrator can allow players to read the *Starfleet Academy Handbook* in this set to familiarize themselves with the Academy.

An Academy cadet series can also begin at a later point, such as the cadets' arrival at the Academy, during their freshman or sophomore years, or even later on when the cadets become upperclassmen. This allows for more experienced cadet characters, although still not as experienced as Starfleet officers. It also shortens the length of the series, but upperclassmen generally have more options in terms of classes and more involvement in field work, research, and other academic work that make for good episodes.

Series Prologue

Although an Academy series can be fun on its own, Narrators can also use an Academy series as a prologue to a regular *Star Trek* series. After the cadets graduate from the Academy, they become the Crew of a starship or starbase in the regular series. In this case, the Narrator may want to speed up the progress of the Academy series to allow the cadets to graduate to the regular series quickly. This could mean running only one or two episodes of the Academy series per semester, allowing the cadets to graduate in eight to twelve episodes or so. The Narrator could even

run just one episode per year, having the whole Academy prologue take just four or five episodes.

Such a prologue tends to create characters with more depth and personality. Players have the opportunity to build their characters in stages, spending Experience Points over the course of their Academy careers and earning Renown and other background elements. This helps form characters who are well rounded with complete backgrounds. Events from the Academy can show up again during the regular series—when one of the characters talks about somebody he knew "back in his Academy days," everyone will know what he is talking about because they were there.

Flashback

The "flashback" offers another option. In this format the Narrator takes characters from a regular *Star Trek* series and goes back in time to tell the story of their Academy days. This could consist of a single episode—where characters recall their time together at the Academy—or it could form the basis of a short series. Although the characters don't receive Experience Points from these adventures, they develop their characters by reliving part of the backstory which shaped their future selves.

To run a flashback series, the Narrator must work with the players to create versions of their characters in their Academy days. The characters should have fewer skills and Renown, no advantages like Promotions or Commendations (except those they'd earned at the Academy), and possibly more disadvantages (things they "bought off" previously). Players should use characters who could have attended the Academy together. Replace more senior characters with other cadet characters (friends of the main characters in their Academy days), or work them in as professors, guest lecturers, field instructors, or visitors to the Academy at the time of the episode. ("I remember when I first met Lieutenant Cheung," Captain Porrikos recalled. "I was delivering a paper on advanced tactical use of sensor arrays at the Academy when he was just a freshman.")

A flashback series poses a large challenge—the Narrator and the players know how things end in some ways. Obviously none of the cadets die, since everyone knows about their future careers. That doesn't mean the Narrator can't provide dramatic tension in the series. A cadet might "die" in an episode and be brought back to life, either through medical technology or alien intervention. The Narrator must keep in mind the established continuity of the present-day series.

A flashback series often provides a simple look into the past of several characters while they were at the Academy, but Narrators can also run the series in other ways. The Narrator could give the characters a reason to recall the events played out in an Academy flashback. Perhaps something happened to the Crew during their Academy days, something related to events in the current episode. The solution to their problem may lie in recalling what happened at the Academy.

Perhaps something blocked characters' memories of the Academy. For example, the Crew became involved with something top secret while at the Academy and voluntarily agreed to have their memories suppressed by a Starfleet telepath. Now, years later, the Crew must recall those memories to deal with a problem that arises. With the aid of another telepath or through the use of hypnosis the Crew "go back" to their Academy days and relive the events they've forgotten. The Narrator can play out the Academy scenes as an episode of their own, then return the Crew to the present. This theme is common in many *Star Trek* episodes.

Time travel offers another option allowing characters to revisit their days at the Academy. A warp accident or some sort of alien technology might send the Crew back in time to when their younger selves attended the Academy. An omnipotent alien like Q might intervene and send characters back to their Academy time, such as in the *Next Generation* episode "Tapestry," when Q offered Captain Picard an opportunity to change his own past shortly after his own Academy days. The Crew might be visitors to the past, or their future minds might enter the bodies of their past selves. What happens if the Crew alters history? What if they're supposed to alter history? For example, after a member of the Crew saves the life

of his younger self, he recalls how a mysterious visitor helped him out in his Academy days. He had always looked familiar, but the cadet couldn't figure out who he was until he saw things from the other side and realized it was his older self visiting from the future.

Advanced Training

Academy graduation by no means signals the end of a Starfleet officer's education. In addition to on-the-job training that Starfleet officers receive, the Academy's Advanced Education Schools offer advanced degrees in many different fields. Normally this advanced study is in the background of a *Star Trek* series. Officers conduct their training "off camera," attend classes between episodes, or take correspondence courses while serving on a starship or starbase. The Advanced Training series takes these elements from the background and makes them the basis of a series.

Time limits this series' format as it does the Academy cadets series. After spending a few weeks at the advanced schools, the characters graduate and move on to other things.

Graduate Study

An Academy cadet series can segue directly into an Advanced Training series if the Narrator and the players wish. Academy graduates move on to study at the advanced schools, each following his particular field of interest. The Crew is no longer as tight-knit as it once was. Officers attend different schools with very different areas of study. Crew members no longer live in the same dorm, but in separate dorms or off-campus housing.

But the Crew is still based largely at the Academy and can easily stay in contact. They also have considerably more freedom, and more responsibility, than Starfleet cadets. Graduate students may spend part of their time teaching or working as teaching assistants in regular Academy classes, combining this format with an Academy educators series (see the following section).

Episodes in a graduate study series can focus on different schools with related problems. Generally episodes must bring the different characters together to handle mutual concerns, somewhat more difficult than in a regular Academy series. Friends from the Academy are likely to help each other out when they can and still socialize together, leading to opportunities for the Narrator to bring the characters together at the start of an episode.

Graduate study episodes can often focus on the different kinds of advanced research conducted at Starfleet Academy. Researchers test new warp theories, build and try out new technologies, and develop new medical techniques for the rest of the Federation. Characters in this series can become involved in developing, testing, and disseminating these new ideas, and dealing with the problems that crop up when they don't quite work as expected.

One School or Many?

In an ongoing advanced training series, the Narrator must decide whether the series focuses on one Advanced Training School or several. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages.

Focusing on one school allows the Narrator to concentrate on characters who all attend or teach at that school. This provides characters a common bond and a good reason to spend so much time together. The episodes can focus around the particular people and events of that school. A series set at Starfleet Medical School would involve medical students, interns, and doctors handling different medical challenges. A series set at the Advanced Tactics School would include mainly command and security officers dealing with tactical problems. This gives the series a very strong theme.

The Narrator and players should take care, however, that characters in a one-school series don't start looking alike. Focusing on specializations helps avoid this. Rather than running a group of doctors, the characters include a virologist, molecular biologist, forensic specialist, and surgeon. The series can also become boring if characters deal with the same types of issues every episode. The Narrator may want to shake things up occasionally and offer the Crew a change of pace. A medical Crew might deal with the problem of a Borg brought in for dissection who somehow revived and took over the entire medical complex.

Focusing on multiple schools allows Narrators to include characters from all different branches of Starfleet, and use of plot lines based around any of the different schools. This broadens the options for the series, but can become less focused and scattered. The Narrator must take care not to focus too much on any one school, or players of other characters might feel slighted.

The Narrator may also find it more difficult to bring characters from different schools together every episode. Narrators might have all the characters know each other from their early days at the Academy (possibly during a previous Academy cadets series). The characters might form part of a special interdisciplinary team studying a particular subject, such as a team assembled by Starfleet to study a new species (for example, the Borg), or a new technology (including its effects on living beings).

Returning to the Academy

Starfleet officers may return to the Academy for further training and education. An officer might choose to change service branches, or accept a promotion to a new position requiring additional training (such as going from tactical to ops). In these cases the officer trains while on duty, or may return to the Academy for additional training. Narrators can use this to insert an Academy episode or miniseries into an ongoing *Star Trek* series.

The Narrator might run a solo episode where one character from the Crew goes back to the Academy for a period of training. In this case the Narrator may run the episode with the player of that one character alone (good for times when only one player is available). The Narrator may assign new characters to the other players: other students attending that advanced school, instructors, and other supporting cast members (see "The Supporting Cast" for more ideas). The solo episode provides a spotlight on that particular character for a while and gives him an opportunity to take center stage. The scenario should remain fairly brief so other players don't feel neglected. The Narrator and the individual player can run this as a separate solo game, perhaps even as an online or play-by-email (PBEM) game.

The Narrator might send a Crew back to the Academy together for specialized training. Perhaps Starfleet introduces a new technology or protocol with which the Crew must become familiar. A Crew transferring from one ship to another may return to the Academy for training seminars on their new vessel's specs and operations. The Crew might attend a tactical seminar on a threat like the Romulans, Borg, or Dominion. They might also receive invitations to attend a particular Academy function, such as escorting an ambassador or other visitor, the graduation of a friend or family member, or the retirement dinner of a beloved professor.

Stories taking the entire Crew back to the Academy tend to last one or two episodes at most. They usually begin with the log entry "We have returned to Starfleet Academy because..." Such an episode serves as a change of pace for a regular series.

Starfleet officers may also return to the Academy to teach. As part of a regular series, a character might go back to the Academy to host a seminar or briefing, deliver a paper, or teach a new technique. Guest lecturing helps recognize the character's achievements in a regular series. If the ship's chief medical officer discovers a treatment for a rare disease like Anghelees fever, she might receive an invitation to teach a seminar on it at Starfleet Medical School. Some incidents might require the entire command crew to deliver briefings at the Academy, such as a report on a major new discovery or an encounter with a new lifeform.

Academy Instructors

In this campaign the players portray teachers at the Academy. In this most difficult of Academy series formats, the Crew cannot usually act together as a group. Academy instructors must train cadets, taking raw young recruits and making them into responsible and capable Starfleet officers. This challenging task is not necessarily the stuff of which great stories are made. To run an Academy instructors series, the Narrator must look at opportunities for the instructors and staff at the Academy to take action.

Narrators might broaden the focus and look at the Academy as a whole. In some ways, the

Academy is not unlike any other Starfleet facility or starbase. It has a commanding officer (the Superintendent), an administrative staff, a counselor, and security. The Academy sees guest speakers, aliens, ambassadors, and many of the same visitors a starbase does. Cadets face their own challenges of ability and character, and don't always succeed.

The Narrator can use this point of view to treat the Academy much like any other Starfleet posting, with some unusual differences. The players can run members of the Academy staff as well as instructors, including the Superintendent, Counselor, Security Chief, and the head of the Starfleet Medical School. In addition to maintaining the smooth functioning of the Academy, the Crew must contend with various challenges that crop up, from security breaches, spies, and saboteurs to lab accidents and troubled cadets.

In many ways this format reverses the Academy cadets format. Here the adult staff members help cadets face their challenges and make sure their personal crises don't upset life at the Academy. For example, cadets might crash on the surface of Venus during a shuttlecraft training flight, sending Academy personnel out looking for them before the systems of their environment suits run low or corrode in the planet's harsh atmosphere.

An Academy instructors series might concentrate on a particular school or related group of schools at the Academy. The players run instructors from those schools much like the one-school format of an advanced training series. It focuses on situations involving that school and gives the Crew a natural reason for working together.

Narrators might run a single episode or miniseries where the Crew of a regular series returns to the Academy to teach particular classes or seminars. This gives players a taste of the experience while allowing them to return to their regular series format immediately after.

THE SUPPORTING CAST

The supporting cast is very important in a Starfleet Academy series, even more so than in a *Star Trek* series set on a starship, because the

Academy is a more "self-contained" setting. It doesn't travel around like a starship, although cadets occasionally leave the Academy for field work. The Academy series focuses on interactions between cadets, instructors, and administrators. The Narrator should give some consideration to these members of the supporting cast.

The Superintendent

The Superintendent is the single most important person at Starfleet Academy. He represents the ultimate authority on Academy matters and decides the fate of cadets to a large degree. The players should find the Superintendent a figure worthy of respect, with just a touch of intimidation from the power he wields. Think of the feeling of being calling into the principal's office in school that's the feeling of the Superintendent's power.

The Superintendent serves as the Narrator's voice in many ways. He gives out commendations to cadets who do well and hands down

punishments to those who don't. The Narrator can use the role of Superintendent to praise the characters for their successes and admonish them on their failures, bringing the experience of being Starfleet cadets to life for them. Cadet characters should seek to win the Superintendent's approval, and his disappointment should have a sobering effect on them.

The Narrator must handle the Superintendent carefully. He is an authority figure, but a sympathetic one, more admired than feared. At the same time, however, don't allow the Superintendent to become too chummy with the characters. They're still just a few cadets out of many. Even if the Superintendent considers them outstanding, he must treat every cadet fairly, and he doesn't want to show favoritism. A good Superintendent allows the cadets some leeway, but tries to rein them in if they go too far. He must sometimes teach cadets harsh lessons by punishing them.

The Superintendent should start the series somewhat distant from the cadets. After all, he has an entire Academy to administer. Over the course of an Academy series cadets get to know the Superintendent better. They can look back on the first time they were ever in his office, good or bad, how he first learned who they were and got to know them. If the characters work to earn the Superintendent's respect, it feels much more rewarding than if they begin with it.

Instructors

Instructors play many roles in an Academy series. They must teach cadets and give them the skills to become Starfleet officers. It is one of the toughest jobs around, but they do it proudly. Some instructors become friends and mentors to their students. Others maintain a more detached, objective distance, while some instructors actually develop a challenging relationship with students to push them toward greater achievement and self-improvement. The Narrator can use all of these types of instructors to enhance an Academy series.

Allies

Everyone has their favorite teachers, and Starfleet Academy is no different. Cadets often form strong bonds with their instructors. Although instructors try to treat all students equally, they often find themselves drawn to particular students who excel in their classes, who are bright and eager to learn. They take such students under their wing to help guide and teach them to reach their full potential.

The advice of a respected teacher can go a long way with a student. Narrators should encourage cadets to listen to their teachers' advice, even if they don't always follow it.

A teacher can offer cadets many opportunities, involving them in special research projects or recruiting them as interns for field work. A teacher can stand up for a student in trouble with the administration or encourage a student having academic problems. Teachers often see potential that cadets don't yet notice, and try to encourage and nurture it. At times their methods may seem strange, especially to a cadet who doesn't understand what the teacher wants to accomplish. For example, a teacher might come down hard on a student, but only because he knows the cadet could do better and wants to encourage him to try harder.

Relationships with friendly teachers are not always pleasant. As with any friends, disagreements can erupt. For example, a teacher might see great potential in a student as a scientist, but the cadet wants to pursue a career in the Command branch and refuses to follow a path in science. What can a teacher do in such a case? Most of the time instructors simply allow cadets to follow their own paths. Teachers help guide them, but cadets must make their own choices. You can be sure, however, that the future Starfleet officer remembers the teacher who encouraged his interest in science.

Advisors

Starfleet instructors provide students with the best and latest information in their field. Cadets can turn to their teachers in episodes when they need data on a particular topic. Do the cadets need to know the feeding patterns of Corvan *gilvos*? All they need to do is drop by the Zoology Department and speak with one of the professors. Do they need to find out about a theoretical warp drive design from a hundred years ago? They can go to the

Engineering Department and ask a professor who specializes in warp theory.

Although cadets can find information in the Academy's computer system, professors offer considerably more insight and they're more likely to know obscure facts the computer does not. Most of the time professors enjoy answering cadets' queries, although they might eventually want to know why the cadets ask those particular questions.

Information provided by instructors can provide cadets important clues and help them in an episode, but the Narrator should take care not to allow an instructor to upstage the cadets by solving the problem for them. Cadets should handle problems because they're the main characters. The instructors can't take time from their busy academic schedules, become too engrossed in their research, or otherwise have some reason why they don't intervene and fix everything for the cadets. They might answer the students' question too narrowly, or could leave the problem for the cadets to solve as an educational experience.

In addition to providing information, instructors also offer useful advice for cadets. Experienced Starfleet Academy instructors understand a lot about life that students are only beginning to learn. Cadets confronted with moral problems or difficult choices can seek out a faculty member to speak to for advice. This includes the Academy Counselor and his staff, along with favorite teachers and mentors. This offers a great roleplaying opportunity where the player can give everyone insights into his character by talking about the character's problems with a supporting cast member. Again, the instructor shouldn't just come out with the easy solution to the cadet's problem, but should offer advice and guidance.

Foils

Sometimes an instructor can serve as a foil in an episode or series, someone who contrasts with the character and spurs him to greater action. Starfleet teachers maintain good relationships with their students. They are hard but fair in their classes. Personality conflicts still occur, and sometimes instructors and students conflict over particular issues. A teacher might plays devil's advocate, arguing with students to encourage their debate skills. An instructor might constantly challenge a cadet to encourage better performance.

Sometimes teachers seem adversarial toward students for their own good, as in the example of the argumentative and challenging instructors above. They may provoke a cadet to get a reaction or encourage a student to try harder. Starfleet does not make a practice of coddling cadets. Sometimes teachers must appear harsh to prepare students for duty. Eventually the cadets realize their instructor's methods actually helped teach them something. The martial arts teacher might consistently pick on a particular cadet in practice bouts, serving him up with humiliating defeats every time. The cadet practices harder and harder, vowing to beat his instructor in a match. Eventually he succeeds, and the instructor points out he wouldn't have tried so hard if he hadn't been pushed so hard in the first place.

Guest Lecturers

Since the rest of the Academy supporting cast generally remains the same from one episode to the next, guest lecturers help bring new blood into an Academy series. Visitors speak to students about a wide range of specialized topics, from Klingon culture and history to a Federation archaeological dig in a newly discovered sector.

Guest lectures also provide an opportunity to include supporting cast members who wouldn't otherwise visit the Academy. For example, few Klingons serve in Starfleet, but the Klingon Empire might send a scholar to teach cadets about Klingon history. The visiting teacher's aggressive teaching style alone would be a lesson in interspecies relations for cadets! Scholars from worlds throughout the Alpha and Beta Quadrants may teach at the Academy, even if their worlds are not Federation members. Other civilizations see this as a means of improving understanding, often a prelude to Federation membership.

Narrators can include famous guest stars from *Star Trek* as visiting lecturers at the Academy. Captain Picard might deliver a paper on archaeology, or Dr. Bashir might

teach a seminar in Gamma Quadrant lifeforms. This lets cadets meet some of the legends of Starfleet in person, adding a fun element to an episode.

Fellow Cadets

Members of many species attend Starfleet Academy: thousands of cadets, each with his own background, history, culture, and ambitions. While the player character cadets are some of the most accomplished, most capable cadets, not all cadets manage to live up to the Academy's exacting standards. These cadets provide a rich source of stories for an Academy series.

Other cadets getting into trouble can give characters some tough challenges and provide them with a chance to shine. Take Mordock for example, the Benzite who won an appointment to the Academy in 2364, in the *Next Generation* episode "Coming of Age." We know Benzites prefer to keep problems to themselves until they find a solution. Imagine Mordock (or another Benzite cadet) discovering a serious problem, but not telling anyone until matters became deadly serious. Or consider Nick Locarno from "The First Duty." Nick was willing to lie to protect his Starfleet crew, and he convinced other cadets to do the same. Fellow cadets can inspire these and many other kinds of problems.

In addition to their role as a source of story ideas, fellow cadets can play other roles in an Academy series.

Recurring Characters

Some cadets can become recurring "bit" characters in the series. They show up in some of the same classes as the player character cadets, or frequent some of the same hangouts on or off campus. Including regular recurring characters helps bring a series to life and gives players a feeling there is more to the Academy than just their own characters. Most of the time recurring characters exist to give the player characters someone to interact with outside their group. They can also provide comic relief with things like cultural misunderstandings, or playing the "straight man" to a player character's pranks (Vulcan cadets are great for this).

Recurring characters can occasionally provide seeds for stories, especially once the cadets get to know them better. For example, the player characters find themselves much more motivated when a recurring character they've known since the start of the series comes to them with a problem, instead of a supporting character who was introduced in this episode. The players should come to care for members of their supporting cast over time, appreciating them as individuals. If you can accomplish that, you've succeeded with the supporting cast.

Rivalries

Rivalries sometimes form between cadets in the Academy's competitive atmosphere. Many Starfleet officers talk about rivals they had back in their Academy days. The player characters are supposed to be some of the finest cadets at the Academy, but that doesn't mean there aren't those who are better—or who at least think they are. A rivalry provides characters an opportunity to show off a little and

demonstrate their abilities in a competitive but generally harmless environment.

Some rivalries go too far and can lead to dangerous consequences. For example, a rival might sabotage another cadet's holosuite program with the idea of embarrassing him, but the program goes out of control and threatens the lives of those inside, including the saboteur. He must confess to help the characters figure a way out. Cadets can learn a valuable lesson from situations like this.

If you use rivalries in your series, try not to let them get out of hand. If every player character cadet has a rival, every story turns into a competition between the cadets and their rivals, and that doesn't follow *Star Trek's* theme of cooperation and teamwork. Rivalries should be the exception rather than the rule.

Red Squad

Narrators might include Red Squad as a particular group of cadets that make useful supporting characters. Red Squad is supposed to be the elite of the Academy. It gets the best training, and special privileges to go with it. This often makes Red Squad cadets seem arrogant, the perfect foils to interact with the player characters. A rivalry between Red Squad and the player characters' squad can provide plenty of story ideas.

Remember, the members of Red Squad are not "bad guys," nor are they playground bullies. They are still cadets devoted to the ideals of Starfleet and the Federation. Red Squad cadets are still cadets, meaning they're young, eager, and sometimes lacking the experience to make the right choices. This can lead Red Squad members into trouble when they try to do the wrong thing for all the right reasons. That's when the player characters must step in and help fix things.

Red Squad might also have some sympathetic supporting characters. While some squad members may seem arrogant or overbearing, the players should also feel some kinship and sympathy for them. They're still fellow cadets with their own personalities and backgrounds. Don't turn Red Squad into faceless goons or they lose their effectiveness as supporting characters.

Civilians

No operation as large as Starfleet Academy can function without civilian assistance. Civilians fill many jobs at the Academy itself, from instructors to groundskeepers to waiters in the local eating establishments. Students can interact with civilians in the city of San Francisco or while visiting other parts of Earth as well.

Civilians serve cadets in their frequented hangouts, like the proprietor at the popular coffee shop in San Francisco where cadets like to relax off campus. Some civilians who help keep the Academy running seem to know everything about its history and goings-on, like Boothby. These characters offer points of view outside the Starfleet structure. The Narrator can use them to fill various story needs. Perhaps cadets regularly encounter a Ferengi trader in San Francisco who's always trying to sell them some worthless junk. They don't take much note of him until they discover they need some information or material available only on the black market. They can't go to anyone at the Academy, but that trader seems like the type who might have connections.

Another group of civilians Narrators shouldn't overlook consists of the cadets' friends and family. Cadets all had lives before they enrolled in the Academy, and those people can turn up over the course of an Academy series. What about an episode that takes place during a parent's weekend, where the Academy invites cadets' family members to the campus to tour the facilities, visit with cadets, and attend a presentation by the Superintendent where cadets are honored for their achievements? This makes a great backdrop for an episode, with cadets dealing with their families on the one hand and trying to handle a new problem on the other.

Cadets very likely have civilian friends outside Starfleet whom they communicate with and visit from time to time. What happens when a cadet gets an unexpected communiqué from a childhood friend in trouble with the law, or facing some other serious challenge? The cadet's squad-mates certainly aren't going to let their friend go off and handle this problem alone!

Aliens

Dozens of alien species populate the *Star Trek* universe. Members of dozens of species attend the Academy as cadets. Mixing so many different cultures in one place sometimes leads to misunderstandings—these can form the basis of subplots and entire episodes. During their Academy experience members of different species learn to get along and work together toward a common goal.

The Academy can also play host to representatives from new species. Perhaps a new cadet represents the first of his species to join Starfleet. Or a group of ambassadors from prospective member planets might visit the Academy as part of their application to join the Federation. Imagine dealing with an Antican cadet who insists on killing his own food animals, or a Romulan cadet whose family has lived in the Federation for several generations, but who still finds distrust and prejudice from some people who think all Romulans are untrustworthy.

Those aliens entirely outside humanoid experience provide a real challenge because they have almost no frame of reference in common with humanoids. What if a Changeling infiltrates the Academy disguised as a cadet and, when discovered, reveals she isn't a spy. She sought to conceal her true nature because she thought others would reject her if they knew she was anything other than humanoid. What happens if some characters in a holosuite program turn out to be photonic lifeforms from another universe?

Some near-omnipotent aliens like Q enjoy toying with "lesser" creatures. Q (or another of his kind) could take an interest in the Academy as a means of "testing" humanoid beings, or simply as a place to have some fun. How does a group of cadets get rid of an omnipotent "friend" following them around, especially when nobody else seems to see or hear him?

Creatures

At Starfleet Academy cadets study lifeforms from across the galaxy. While this often involves dissection, behavioral studies, or holographic simulations, odd creatures can discover opportunities to find their way onto campus. What happens if a pair of rare Corvan *gilvos* accidentally escape from their pen? The cadets must chase down the endangered and elusive animals and return them to their cage before anyone finds out they're missing.

Cadets might also encounter alien lifeforms while conducting field work. Perhaps cadets run into a wild Tarkassisan razorbeast while on a survival trip. How do they deal with the animal without hurting it? Perhaps the razorbeast's sudden appearance represents some kind of test.

STORY THEMES

The basic themes of *Star Trek* stories (*ST:TNG* rulebook page 163) apply equally well to a Starfleet Academy series. While some episodes may just tell a fun story of the cadets' exploits, the majority of episodes should have themes. The cadets are at the Academy to learn, not to have fun.

Exploration and Discovery

While there aren't many opportunities for cadets to explore the uncharted reaches of the galaxy, a Starfleet Academy education centers on discovery. Cadets learn about Vulcan culture, Klingon history, the scientific process, duty, honor, and hundreds of other subjects.

Many episodes can focus on the thrill of discovery, whether in the field or at the Academy itself. Cadets interact with representatives of many different species, allowing them to explore other cultures without ever leaving the campus. Cadets are also exposed to the latest scientific theories and experiments, giving them opportunities to discover new phenomena all the time.

In addition to discovering the universe around them, cadets also learn things about themselves at the Academy. A cadet might learn how to work with individuals of a different species for the first time, or overcome a personal handicap to make it in Starfleet. The Academy helps cadets discover their own talents and inner strengths, and learn how to overcome their weaknesses.

Cadets should learn something in a discovery episode. A scenario might focus on an obscure aspect of an alien culture. Cadets might have to perform an experiment successfully or learn a par-

ticular fact. The process of discovery could complicate matters—an experiment gone awry, a mistake in etiquette, research putting the cadets in danger.

Mishaps

A special twist on the discovery theme is the "mishap" story. The cadets make some honest mistake and they try to correct it before anyone else finds out what happened. Cadets might conduct a delicate experiment, only overlook some minor detail and spawn some new kind of lifeform that escapes and sneaks around the campus. A warp field experiment could send the cadets into a parallel universe. Their instructor entrusts them with a one-of-a-kind artifact for research purposes, and they discover it's missing or stolen. The cadets must try to resolve the situation, doing what's right even if it makes them look bad.

Of course, cadets must also learn when to own up to their mistakes. Starfleet Academy doesn't have a policy against making mistakes. Academy educators know students learn by doing, and mistakes happen. Cadets learn through experience when to clean up their own mess and when to ask for help.

Defending the Good

Starfleet cadets don't often get opportunities to safeguard the entire Federation from danger. Most episodes following this theme have a smaller scale. Cadets have opportunities to protect and maintain the honor and safety of the Academy and the good name of Starfleet. Stories following this theme often revolve around cadets upholding the principles of the Academy Code of Conduct and Starfleet ideals. Cadets can also help safeguard their fellow cadets when they get into trouble, as in the case of a "mishap" situation above.

That is not to say that cadets don't ever get the opportunity to safeguard the Federation. Enemies like the Romulans or the Cardassians take a keen interest in many of the research projects conducted at the Academy. Cadets can help ferret out spies looking to steal Federation secrets, or agents aiming to kill or kidnap prominent Federation personalities. These rare events should be the exception rather than the rule.

Moral Dilemmas

Starfleet considers moral development one of the cornerstones of an Academy education. Starfleet wants only those people of the highest moral caliber as officers entrusted with the Federation's safety.

Cadets are supposed to stay out of trouble and keep their noses (and their records) clean. For a good story, however, the cadets need some complications and conflicts. They often face moral dilemmas. If the cadets make a mistake, do they inform the authorities or try to handle it themselves? Perhaps a cadet must choose between duty to his squad and upholding the Academy Code of Conduct. If a fellow cadet gets into trouble, do the cadets try to cover it up to protect her, or do they inform the administration? What happens when a cadet gets caught between Starfleet ideals and the demands of his culture? What takes greater precedence, the good of the one or the good of the many?

Moral dilemmas should teach cadets lessons about what it means to serve as Starfleet

officers. Some moral dilemmas may confront them as deliberate tests, while others spring up as part of the cadets' Academy experience.

Free Will

The ability to make choices and deal with the consequences of one's own actions is a key theme in *Star Trek*. At the Academy, cadets learn all about making decisions and often face some of the most important decisions of their lives.

All the preceding themes offer opportunities for cadets to make choices. Do they try to overcome a problem on their own or ask for help? Do they adapt to the demands of another culture? Some cadets make difficult choices in joining Starfleet to begin with. Can a Ferengi cadet put aside his culture's emphasis on profit and live up to Starfleet's ideals? Does a half-Romulan cadet pretend to be half-Vulcan to hide her true heritage? And what happens when someone discovers the truth? Cadets actively make these choices and must accept responsibility for any consequences.

IDIC

The theme of Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations plays a major role at the Academy. Cadets come here from all across the galaxy to become part of something greater than themselves, greater than any individual culture or species. Part of the Federation, and of Starfleet's, strength comes from the diversity of its people. Stories following this theme should teach cadets that every culture has value, that Starfleet officers must understand and respect the differences of others.

IDIC stories challenge cadets with uncomfortable cultural situations. What happens when a cadet must work with an alien whose idea of cooperation differs from the norm? How do characters react to a new cadet whose society's idea of personal property seems more communal than they're used to? Can cadets prepare a reception for visiting dignitaries, researching and enacting the customs lest they commit some breach of etiquette? If cadets can learn to accept others and overcome their own prejudices, they're one step closer to attaining the Starfleet ideal.

ACADEMY THEMES

Here are some sample story lines that follow the common *Star Trek* themes.

Exploration and Discovery

- An accident during an experiment leads to the discovery of a new phenomenon.
- A cadet learns about his true heritage or background.
- A new culture throws some light on the human experience.
- Cadets explore new ideas using holodeck simulations.
- Cadets experience famous historical events using simulations.
- A cadet is the first of her species to enter Starfleet.

Defending the Good

- The Crew must deal with rival squads or factions.
- Someone places a cadet's life in danger and his comrades must save him.
- An accident during a training session or experiment endangers lives.
- The Crew must ferret out a spy at the Academy.
- Cadets on a training mission unexpectedly become embroiled in a skirmish or battle.

Moral Dilemmas

- Cadets discover a violation of the Academy Code.
- A cadet must choose between duty and another obligation.
- Cadets must own up to a mistake or failing and risk punishment.
- Advancement at the cost of another cadet's career tempts a cadet.
- A cadet must choose between a beloved teacher and doing what's right.

Free Will

- A cadet chooses to sacrifice for the greater good.
- An offer of power or some other goal tempts a cadet.
- A cadet must choose whether or not to leave the squad or Starfleet.
- Powerful aliens test the cadets to understand Starfleet

IDIC

- A new cadet who seemed hostile turns out to be misunderstood and lonely.
- A cadet's cultural background proves the key to solving a particular problem.
- Cadets become involved in a diplomatic greeting of a new species.
- An anthropology field study reveals things about being a good officer.

Faced with a difficult survival course on a hostile alien planet, the Crew finds itself embroiled in a real-life showdown with a Cardassian aggressor. To survive –let alone warn Starfleet of the encroaching danger—they must put their limited training, and all the initiative and ingenuity they can muster, to a test that goes well beyond what they were prepared for.

SUMMARY

"Survival Test" is a scenario set against cadet training away from the Starfleet Academy campus. In this episode the cadet Crew undergoes a survival test. The cadets travel to an alien planet, where their instructor drops them off and expects them to survive for three days using the skills they developed in class and simulation. This serves as the final exam for the Academy course STAR 104 Planetary Survival.

The episode starts with the cadets practicing on a holodeck aboard the *U.S.S. Fearless*, the vessel transporting them to Aldos II, a planet near the Cardassian Demilitarized Zone. Their practice session ends abruptly when they arrive in the planet's orbit.

The cadets board a shuttle to take them to the planet's surface, giving them a chance to test their piloting skills along the way. Shortly after leaving the *Fearless*, a Cardassian warship attacks and

severely damages the shuttle. The Cardassians move on to attack the *Fearless*, leaving the shuttle plunging into the atmosphere.

The resulting crash seriously injures the cadets' instructor. They must survive in the hostile wilderness of Aldos II and find some way to send for help. Along the way, the cadets encounter a previously unknown lifeform on the planet and make peaceful contact with the Aldosians. They also discover a force of Cardassian militia on the planet apparently there to construct a secret base on Aldos, possibly a launching point for a new offensive against the Federation. The cadets must overcome the Cardassian defenses and escape the planet to warn Starfleet.

BACKGROUND

The cadets should belong to the same squad and should have taken either planetary survival or vehicle operations classes at the Academy. The cadets should have a rating of at least 1 in Planetary Survival (specialization of the cadet's choice). At least one cadet should have a rating of 1 or better in Vehicle Operations (Shuttlecraft). At the end of the semester, the squad receives orders to report to the *U.S.S. Fearless*, which takes them to Aldos II, the site of their final exam in planetary survival. Going along for the trip is Commander Hans Zakarian, a planetary survival instructor whose nickname "Sneezy"—for his frequent allergies—cadets never use in his presence.

The entire episode is really an extended Academy test. The cadets never actually leave the holodeck in Act One; they're in it for the entire episode. Everything that happens—from the crash to the Cardassian attack to the Aldosian encounter—constitutes a complex simulation. The exam not only tests the cadets' survival and piloting skills, but how they han-

THWARTING THE TEST

It is possible that a clever group of players may suspect the events in this episode are actually a hidden test. In this case, the cadets may try to find a way to get around the simulation and "win" using their technical rather than their survival skills

If the players decide to try this, let them. It requires a Difficult (13) Search Test to find a concealed access panel on the holodeck (proving the cadets are in fact in a simulation). A Challenging (10) Systems Engineering Test is needed to open the magnetically sealed panel, providing access to the holodeck's isolinear matrix. A Difficult (13) Computer (Data Alteration) Test is needed to override the holodeck's control systems and alter the program. It requires only a Moderate (7) Computer Test to crash the program and shut down the holodeck.

Cadets who figure out the true nature of the test and override the program get a commendation for their cleverness and original thinking. Then they get taken down to the surface of Aldos II for the real survival test. Use the material in Act One as a guideline for handling the cadets' three days in the Aldosian jungle.

dle the unexpected, react under pressure, and deal with delicate situations like first contact when their lives are at stake.

During the course of the episode, the cadets never confront actual danger. Enemies fire energy weapons set on stun, while primitive weapons and creatures never do any permanent harm; however, everything feels and seems very real. The cadets should have no reason to believe they're in a holodeck simulation. The Narrator should take care to describe the events in the episode as if they were actually happening.

Instructors carefully monitor the cadets' progress throughout the test. The cadets are the only real people on the holodeck. Everyone and everything else they encounter is only a simulation.

MODIFYING THE EPISODE

If desired, the Narrator may continue or elaborate upon the events in this episode. For example, the cadets might have to cover much more ground before encountering the Aldosians, forcing them to encounter different animals; find food; overcome natural obstacles like gorges, pitfalls, and raging rivers; and endure bad weather, poisonous insects, or jungle pollen with hallucinogenic properties. The Crew might find the Aldosians hostile, or divided between warring factions that must be united before they can offer the Crew any aid against the Cardassians. You can replace the Cardassians with Romulans, Breen, or any other threat race desired. For a really difficult test, the Borg might begin assimilating the science station and the Aldosians while mining useful ores from the planet!

You can add plot elements to the episode that come from outside the test itself. For example, what if photonic lifeforms infiltrate the holodeck, beings who have no previous contact with humanoids and no understanding that the cadets' experiences amount to a test? What if their presence (or some other interference or systems failure) takes the holodeck's safety overrides off-line and traps the cadets inside a "test" that has become all too real? Perhaps the *Fearless* comes under attack by real Cardassians during the Crew's test inside the holodeck. The Cardassians could capture the ship, leaving the cadets the only crew members unaccounted for. They could finish their test only to discover a real Cardassian threat awaits them outside.

You can also change the episode by ignoring the holodeck elements and assuming all the events described actually take place. The cadets really fly the shuttle to Aldos II, Commander Zakarian sustains real injuries, and the Cardassians really attack. In this case, the cadets must assume responsibility for making first contact with a new species and helping to save the Federation scientists. The Cardassians should probably not actually destroy the *Fearless* but merely disable it, and the cadets get help from another Federation ship sent to investigate shortly after they overcome the Cardassians.

ALDOS II

Planet Name: Aldos II

Class: M

System Data: Aldos II has two F Class moons.

Gravity: 0.89 G

Year and Day: 384/22

Atmosphere: Oxygen-nitrogen, with high water vapor content. Earth-normal pressure.

Hydrosphere: 60% surface water

Climate: Hot and moist

Sapient Species: None (the Aldosians are a fictional species)

Tech Level: Zero

Government: None

Culture: None

Affiliation: United Federation of Planets

Resources: Considerable biological resources

Places of Note: The Federation maintains a small research lab here.

Ship Facilities: None

Other Details: Aldos II hosts a wide variety of plant and animal life, making it a veritable biological laboratory. Many of the larger lifeforms on the planet are predatory. The Federation maintains a small research lab on the surface of the planet to study its biological diversity

The Supporting Cast

The following supporting cast members appear in this episode. All are actually holodeck characters generated by the ship's computer, although the real Commander Zakarian stays aboard the *Fearless* to monitor the cadets' performance.

ALDOSIAN LION

Type: Pouncing Hunter

Size: 3 meters long and 200 kilograms in weight

Form: Sleek, four-legged, furred mammal

Attributes: Fitness 3 (Strength +3, Vitality +1), Coordination 3, Presence 4, Instinct 2 (Ferocity +1)

Base Movement: Walk 10/30

Resistance: 9

Special Abilities/Unusual Skills: Night Vision, Stealth (Stealthy Movement) 2

Weapons: Claws 3, Teeth 3

Difficulty: Moderate (6)

Damage: 2+2d6

Description and Additional Notes: A predator native to Aldos II, the Aldosian lion inhabits the lowland jungles, hunting smaller animals. The lion is a large feline similar to the saber-toothed tiger of Earth's ancient past. Its gray fur with greenish stripes allows it to blend into the jungle foliage, and it stalks prey with surprising stealth. The primarily nocturnal creature sleeps in its den during the daytime.

The cadets encounter a simulated Aldosian lion during the teaser scene and again during their survival test.

Commander Hans Zakarian, Starfleet Instructor

Narrators can find Commander Zakarian's statistics and description on page 85 of the *Starfleet Academy Handbook*. Commander Zakarian does not really accompany the cadets during their test. The "Commander Zakarian" who goes with them is just a holodeck simulation of the real Commander. The cadets can't tell this amazingly accurate simulation from the real Zakarian. It even suffers from the same allergic reactions that earned the Commander the nickname "Sneezy." The simulated Commander Zakarian spends much of his time unconscious during the test, giving the cadets someone to look after.

The Aldosians

Starfleet created the "Aldosians" as a fictional species for Academy tests like the one in this episode. No native sentient lifeforms really inhabit Aldos II. In case any cadets researched Aldos II before their exam, Starfleet designed the Aldosians as a plausible species for the planet's environment. The small humanoids average about 1.5 meters in height. A fine gray fur covers their bodies, providing them with some natural camouflage. Their vestigial tails and flaps of skin stretched between their arms and legs allow them to glide short distances (up to 100 meters) at a rate of 10 meters per round. Golden eyes slitted like a cat's provide them with excellent night vision (the same as the Night Vision advantage). Aldosians wear little clothing, usually just loincloths and harnesses to carry any equipment. As marsupials, females carry young in a "pouch" until they mature sufficiently to leave on their own.

The Aldosians' primitive culture exists on a hunter/gatherer level. Starfleet considers them Tech Level One for the most part, with some very limited agriculture and animal domestication. The peaceful Aldosians rarely war with each other. They fear and resent the Cardassians, who've enslaved many of their people. If the player characters can convince the Aldosians of their good will, they can gain valuable allies in their mission.

Attributes

Fitness 2 [5]
  Vitality +1
Coordination 2 [5]
Intellect 2 [4]
  Perception +1
Presence 2 [5]
Psi 0

Skills

Athletics (Climbing) 1 (2)

Culture (Aldosian) 1 (2)
Languages
Aldosian 1
Planetside Survival (Jungle) 1 (2)
Primitive Weaponry (Dagger or Spear) 1 (2)
Stealth (Hide) 1 (2)
World Knowledge (Aldos II) 1 (2)

Special Abilities

Aldosians' membranes allow them to glide short distances through the air, at a rate of 10 meters per round for up to 100 meters.

NEXX, ALDOSIAN TRIBAL LEADER

Nexx leads the Thelgor tribe of Aldosians the cadets encounter on Aldos II. Although a little on the tall side for an Aldosian, he still stands a good head shorter than most humans. Soft, gray fur covers his body and his eyes glow a bright golden color. The young tribal leader assumed the role when the Cardassians killed his father, the previous leader, and enslaved a large portion of his tribe. He harbors a strong hatred for the Cardassians and wants to see them driven off Aldos. Characters may have to rein in the hot-headed Nexx to keep him from making rash decisions.

Like all the supporting cast members in this episode, the holodeck generates Nexx's presence. He still acts real enough that characters should feel some sympathy for him.

Attributes

Fitness: 2
Vitality +1
Coordination: 3
Intellect: 2
Perception +1
Presence: 3
Psi: 0

Skills

Athletics (Climbing) 2 (3)
Command (Combat Leadership) 1 (2)
Culture (Aldosian) 1 (2)
Diplomacy (Tribal Affairs) 1 (2)
Dodge 2
First Aid (Wound/Combat Trauma) 1 (2)
Languages
Aldosian 2
Planetside Survival (Jungle) 2 (3)
Primitive Weaponry (Dagger) 2 (3)
(Spear) (3)
Search 2
Stealth (Hide) 2 (3)
Unarmed Combat (Brawling) 1 (2)
World Knowledge (Aldos II) 2 (3)

Advantages and Disadvantages

Night Vision +2, Obligation (to his tribe) –2

Resistance: 3
Wound Levels: 3/3/3/3/3/3/0

GUL GIVAR, CARDASSIAN FOURTH ORDER

Gul Givar commands the Cardassian base on Aldos II. Starfleet based this holodeck character on an amalgam of Cardassian characteristics. Play him as a stereotypical Cardassian enemy: cruel, efficient, and ruthless in carrying out his duties.

Attributes

Fitness: 3
Strength +1
Coordination: 2
Intellect: 3
Perception +1
Presence: 3
Willpower +1
Psi: 0

Skills

Administration (Planetary Government) 1 (2)
Athletics (Running) 1 (2)
Command (Military Base) 2 (3)
Culture (Cardassian) 1 (2)
Dodge 1
Energy Weapon (Cardassian Phaser) 2 (3)
Intimidation (Torture) 2 (3)
Language
Cardassian 3
Personal Equipment (Communicator) 2 (3)
Planetary Tactics (Small Unit) 2 (3)
Search 1
Security (Law Enforcement) 1 (2)

Unarmed Combat (Cardassian martial arts) 2 (3)
Vehicle Operation (Shuttlecraft) 1 (2)
World Knowledge (Cardassia Prime) 2 (3)

Advantages and Disadvantages

Eidetic Memory +3, Arrogant –1, Bloodlust –2

Resistance: 3
Wound Levels: 3/3/3/3/3/3/0

CARDASSIAN MILITIAMEN

These typical Cardassian soldiers carry out Gul Givar's orders obediently, with as much arrogance and cruelty as one would expect from a faceless Cardassian goon. Starfleet programmed these holographic troopers according to prejudiced stereotypes to inspire some reactions from the characters.

Attributes

Fitness: 3
Coordination: 2
Intellect: 2
  Perception +1
Presence: 3
  Willpower +1
Psi: 0

Skills

Athletics (Running) 1 (2)
Culture (Cardassian) 1 (2)
Dodge 1
Energy Weapon (Cardassian Phaser) 1 (2)
Intimidation (Torture) 1 (2)
Personal Equipment (Tricorder) 1 (2)
Search 1
Security (Law Enforcement) 1 (2)
Unarmed Combat (Cardassian martial arts) 1 (2)
Vehicle Operation (Shuttlecraft) 1 (2)
World Knowledge (Cardassia Prime) 1 (2)

Advantages and Disadvantages

Arrogant –1

Resistance: 3
Wound Levels: 3/3/3/3/3/3/0

TEASER: SURVIVAL TEST

As the episode opens, the cadets practice for their survival test in a holodeck on the *Fearless*, an *Excelsior*-class vessel. Read the following out loud to the players:

"Captain's Log, *U.S.S. Fearless*. We have taken aboard several squads of Starfleet cadets en route to Aldos II, where they hope to complete their final examination in planetary survival. Some of the cadets are practicing in the ship's holodeck at this moment. I recall my own survival exam at the Academy years ago. From what I remember, they're going to need all the practice they can get."

Switch to Holodeck Two on board the *Fearless*, where the squad practices for their exam on Aldos II. The holodeck creates a simulation of the Aldosian jungle, and the cadets make their way through the thick jungle growth. Clouds of stinging insects buzz around the cadets in the hot, humid air. The cadets cut through the heavier jungle vines with

machetes, wearing full packs of survival gear that weigh heavily on their shoulders.

Suddenly the cadets hear a roaring noise echo through the jungle. A Routine (5) Planetary Survival Test reveals that the noise comes from an Aldosian lion, a fierce native predator lurking nearby.

Give the cadets a few moments to decide what they're doing. Then the lion springs out from the jungle brush and attacks, trying to pounce on one of the cadets and bear him to the ground. If successful, the lion grapples with the cadet. This makes hitting the lion with phaser fire more difficult (+2 Difficulty). Any shot that misses the lion but with a total greater than 4 hits the grappled character instead. The cadet's simulated phasers inflict only stun damage on other characters, even if they put them on a higher setting.

Once the cadets overcome the lion (or it appears about to overcome them), the program suddenly freezes and the holodeck doors open to reveal Commander Hans Zakarian, the squad's Academy instructor for this test. Commander Zakarian smiles broadly. "Hope you've had enough practice, cadets," he says. "It's time for the real thing."

Act One: Hard Landing

In this act the cadets fly a shuttle to the surface of Aldos II. A Cardassian warship attacks them while still in orbit and forces them to crash-land on the surface. Keep in mind the cadets never actually leave the holodeck aboard the *Fearless*.

THE GULLIVER

After Commander Zakarian greets the cadets on the holodeck, he introduces himself to any he doesn't already know. He then escorts the cadets to the ship's shuttlebay, where the *Gulliver*, a Type 7 Personnel Shuttle, waits to carry them to the surface of Aldos II. For shuttle stats see page 221 of the *Star Trek: TNG* rulebook.

If any of the cadets ask why they are taking a shuttle rather than using the transporter, Commander Zakarian explains the cadets should use this opportunity to refine their piloting expertise along with their survival skills. He picks a cadet to pilot the shuttle (preferably the one with the highest Vehicle Operation skill) and orders everyone on board. A few moments later the shuttlebay door opens and the Crew can depart.

The shuttle pilot must make a Routine (3) Vehicle Operations Test to clear the shuttlebay and steer the shuttle on a course for Aldos II. A failure triggers an automatic tractor beam which catches the shuttle before it collides with anything, although this earns the cadet a stern look from Commander Zakarian. As the *Gulliver* clears the bay, the cadets see the surface of Aldos II far below them. Heavy greenery covers the planet, with thick jungles near its equator and several large oceans. Commander Zakarian gives the pilot coordinates near the planet's equatorial region, where he plans to begin the survival test.

The Commander takes a few moments to explain the test to the cadets. He intends to drop them off in a region of the Aldosian jungle equipped with standard survival gear, now stowed on board the shuttle. Each of them carries a Type 1 phaser, a tricorder, and a combadge. The squad also receives a medical kit and a day's worth of emergency rations. They must hike from the landing site to the Federation exobiology station some three days' journey; find shelter, food, and drinkable water; and deal with any threats from the native lifeforms along the way. They can signal the *Fearless*, which remains in orbit, for an emergency beam-out at any time, although this ends the test.

"Any questions?" the Commander asks. Before anyone else speaks, an emergency indicator beeps on the shuttle's console.

THE CARDASSIANS ATTACK

A Cardassian *Galor*-class warship appears from behind Aldos II's larger moon and moves on an intercept course with the *Fearless*.

The *Gulliver* flies right across the Cardassian vessel's path. The Cardassians ignore any attempts to hail them and immediately open fire on the shuttle with their forward plasma banks. The shuttle has no

weapons. Unless the cadets jury rig some extraordinarily innovative weapon, they have no means of attacking the Cardassians.

The shuttle's pilot can take evasive action. This requires a Moderate (8) Vehicle Operation (Shuttlecraft) Test. Even if the pilot manages to evade the first few shots, the next ones connect. The *Gulliver's* insufficient shields cannot block the effects of the warship's weapons. Two hits knock out the shuttle's shields, and the next critically damages the *Gulliver*, sending the shuttle falling into the planet's atmosphere. An explosion on the port side badly injures Commander Zakarian and knocks him to the floor.

After it cripples the *Gulliver*, the Cardassian ship continues on course toward the *Fearless*. The cadets can make out indications of a fierce battle going on between the two vessels. Then they must refocus their attention to concentrate on surviving the crash.

THE SHUTTLE CRASH

The *Gulliver* plunges into the atmosphere of Aldos II at a steep angle. The Cardassian attack badly damaged the shuttle's impulse drive and knocked the flight control systems off-line. The cadets must accomplish several tasks to regain control of the shuttle enough to survive the crash. Each task shows pertinent skills characters must use.

- *The cadets must bring the impulse drive back online: Propulsion Engineering (Impulse).*
- *They must bring the flight control systems back online: Systems Engineering (Flight Systems).*
- *They must locate a suitable landing area on the planet: Shipboard Systems (Sensors).*
- *They must maintain the shuttle's structural integrity against the stress and heat of re-entry: Material Engineering (Structural/Spaceframe) or Shipboard Systems (Shields).*
- *The pilot of the shuttle must bring it in for an emergency landing: Vehicle Operations (Shuttlecraft).*

Do not tell the players the Difficulty for any of these actions; just let them go ahead and roll. As long as all the skill rolls beat a Routine (4) Difficulty, the squad survives the shuttle crash uninjured. If a character fails a skill roll, look grim, roll some dice, and shake your head. Nothing bad happens, but the players don't need to know that! If the squad scores a dramatic failure on any Test, then 1d6 characters sustain injuries during the crash (say, 2 to 4 Wound Points each, for scrapes and bruises). In any event, the *Gulliver* is an almost total loss.

The shuttle rushes toward the planet's surface, not far from the squad's planned landing area. It crashes through trees and jungle growth for some distance before coming to rest with a jolt. The impact throws the characters around the shuttle cabin, but they sustain no injuries (unless they scored a dramatic failure, as above). They can open the shuttle door using the manual override panel—a Routine (3) Shipboard Systems Test.

The late afternoon jungle air sits hot and humid around the shuttle. The cadets can hear the distant sounds of alien lifeforms in the wilderness. The crash destroyed the shuttle's communications system, and the cadets' combadges get no response from the *Fearless*. They are on their own.

SURVIVAL

The Crew members must first see to their basic survival needs. The crash damaged the shuttle's systems beyond repair (any character with Systems or Propulsion Engineering determines this without a Skill Test). Luckily, the cadets' personal equipment still functions.

Some of the cadets may have minor injuries if the crash went particularly badly. If so, they can use the medical kit and First Aid to treat them. Commander Zakarian lies unconscious on the floor of the shuttle, badly injured. A Routine (4) First Aid or Medical Sciences Test with the aid of a tricorder determines he broke his left leg and has three broken ribs, a concussion, and some internal bleeding. The supplies in the medical kit help stabilize the Commander's condition, but treating him requires more sophisticated equipment than the cadets have. Nothing the

Crew does restores Zakarian to consciousness. Some might suspect the head trauma caused brain damage.

The crash ruined nearly all the Crew's supply of rations. Less than half a day's rations remain, with no clean water. The crash damaged the shuttle's replicator beyond repair. The cadets can hunt for food, either local plants or game animals, by making a Moderate (7) Planetary Survival (Jungle) Test. Finding water presents a more difficult challenge. To look for water, the Crew must leave the shuttle and try following animal tracks and other signs to lead them to a nearby river or spring. The cadets may also try to jury-rig a means of extracting water from the local plants or from the humid air. If they come up with a reasonable-sounding plan, let them try it with a Planetary Survival Test.

This scene should give the cadets a chance to display initiative and put their training into action. Try giving the players as little guidance as possible—let them figure out what they must take care of next. You can play out this scene as long as the players enjoy having their characters make arrangements to survive in the jungle.

Act Two: First Contact

In this act the cadets must survive in the inhospitable Aldosian jungle, dealing with hostile animals and with a Cardassian search party looking for them. They encounter representatives of a primitive species on the planet and must establish peaceful contact with them. The Narrator may need to adjust the events described in this act to fit the plans and actions of the cadets. Feel free to improvise where needed.

The cadets must decide whether to stay with the wreck of the *Gulliver* or to try heading out into the Aldosian jungle on their own. The shuttle's hull provides some shelter against the local jungle lifeforms, and moving Commander Zakarian might further injure him. The cadets know that if the *Fearless* managed to drive off the Cardassians, it'll certainly begin searching for the shuttle's crash site; however, the cadets remain unable to raise the *Fearless* on their communicators, and they suspect the Cardassians might come looking for the shuttle wreckage as well. Remaining with the shuttle may put the cadets in further danger. They also know they may be able to get medical assistance for Commander Zakarian at the Federation exobiology research station. The cadets cannot raise the research station on their communicators, either, so the Cardassians might already have captured or destroyed the station.

If the players decide to remain at the shuttle site and await help, they must make Planetary Survival Tests to gather food and find drinkable water. The encounter with the Aldosian lion takes place while some of the characters venture outside looking for food and water.

If the players decide to make their way through the jungle toward the research station, they must rig some sort of stretcher to carry Commander Zakarian, who remains unconscious. They can build something suitable using wreckage from the shuttle. The characters then must make their way on foot through the thick jungle toward the research station.

Allow them to travel for at least a day before they encounter the lion. Feel free to place additional challenges in the cadets' path, such as a swift river or deep gorge they must cross. They may encounter other native lifeforms (see the "Creatures" chapter of the *Star Trek: TNG* rulebook, page 291, for creature ideas).

THE CARDASSIAN SEARCH PARTY

Regardless of whether or not they stay with the shuttle, the cadets soon get some company. A matter of hours after the crash, around sunset, the cadets spot a shuttle of Cardassian design. It flies low over the treetops, clearly scanning the area for any signs of survivors. If the cadets remain with the shuttle, the Cardassians almost certainly capture them. If they venture into the jungle, the heavy foliage and jungle heat helps shield them from the Cardassian sensors. The shuttle flies overhead in a search pattern but does not appear to notice the characters, as long as they remain hidden in the jungle. Have the players make Stealth Tests for their characters, but allow them to evade the Cardassians as long as they don't roll a dramatic failure.

If the characters choose to remain with the shuttle and the Cardassians capture them, you can end the test there, or allow the Aldosians to show up and ambush the Cardassians, giving the characters a fighting chance. The pilot of the Cardassian shuttle takes off, leaving the other Cardassians behind. The characters might interrogate them for information about the Cardassians' plans (although they find the Cardassians highly uncooperative). The cadets also must stop the Aldosians, who hate the Cardassians, from killing their prisoners.

STALKED

During the cadets' first night on Aldos, they run into one of the planet's most dangerous native lifeforms, an Aldosian lion stalking them as prey. It either comes into the crash site looking for food or picks up the Crew's trail as they make their way through the jungle.

If the Crew use the shuttle hull for shelter, the lion waits outside the clearing, pouncing when a character emerges. If the characters trek through the jungle, the lion attacks after they stop and settle down to rest. A Challenging (10) Search Test allows a cadet to detect the lion before it pounces.

During the fight with the lion, ignore any damage result greater than Injured. The holodeck's safety protocols prevent the cadets from becoming badly injured, but they don't know that! To them the fight should seem completely real. The same conditions apply here as in the teaser; hitting the lion with a phaser beam is +2 to the Difficulty, and any attack that fails to hit the lion, but has a total of 4 or greater, hits the grappled character instead. Even if a character's phaser is set on "kill" it does not do more than stun the affected character (you can explain away such an effect as a "glancing shot" or "near miss").

UNEXPECTED HELP

During this act, whenever the cadets most need it, help arrives in the form of the Aldosians. A party of a dozen Aldosian hunters led by Nexx appears and aids the Crew. This happens either after the Cardassian search party captures the Crew, or while the Crew fight the Aldosian lion. The aliens help the Crew overcome their opponents, then attempt to question them to find out who they are and why they're on Aldos.

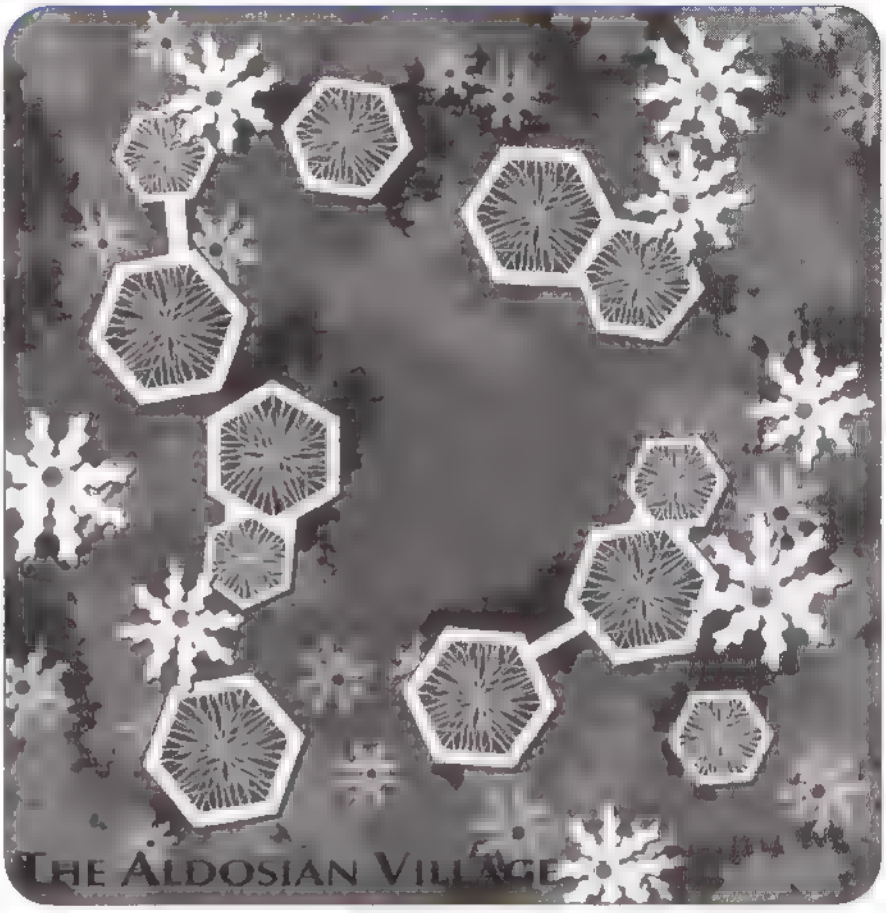
It takes only a few minutes for the universal translators in the Crew's combadges to pick up enough of the Aldosian language for the cadets to communicate. The Crew can use gestures and other basic forms of communication to show their peaceful intentions until their translators kick in. The Aldosians seem cautious, but since the characters aren't Cardassians, the Aldosians take no immediately hostile actions. Nexx asks the characters who they are and how they came here. If the characters explain, Nexx asks if they are like the others who have come from the sky, describing or indicating the Cardassians.

As long as the characters make it clear they are not allies of the Cardassian invaders, the Aldosians trust them. Nexx points out that the characters look similar to the first visitors, the "people from the metal caves" (the members of the Federation science team). Nexx's tribe was considering making contact with the science

team just before the Cardassians arrived. According to the Aldosians' story, the Cardassians seized control of the science station and placed it under guard. The cadets won't find any help there.

Assuming they establish peaceful relations, Nexx invites the Crew to come to his village, where they can find rest and food, and plan their next move.

If for some reason the Crew attacks the Aldosians, Nexx and his hunters fight back to the best of their ability. The Aldosians are no match for Starfleet cadets armed with phasers, or Cardassians armed with disruptors. Once they lose half their number, they flee back into the jungle and disappear. The cadets receive no further help from the Aldosians and may even suffer sneak attacks and ambushes from them while they remain in the jungle, greatly complicating the remainder of their test. After the test, the cadets receive a strict admonishment from Commander Zakarian about studying Starfleet first-contact protocols more seriously.


THE ALDOSIAN VILLAGE

THE ALDOSIAN VILLAGE

Nexx's village stands about a day's travel from the Federation science station. It consists of a collection of huts built high up in the treetops, connected by narrow rope bridges and platforms. Most of the time the Aldosians move from tree to tree by gliding. The village's height protects it from predators living on the ground. Rope ladders allow the hunters and their guests to climb up into the village

The Aldosians welcome the cadets into the village freely, assuming they did nothing to offend Nexx or the others. The aliens take Commander Zakarian into their care and treat him using some native herbal remedies. The tribe's healer, Jos, demonstrates her healing techniques for any interested cadets. She stabilizes the Commander's condition, although he still does not regain consciousness. The cadets must get him to a Federation medical facility to receive proper treatment.

The cadets do not succeed in establishing contact with the *Fearless*. They can only assume the Cardassians destroyed, captured, or drove away the Federation ship. That means they can expect no outside assistance, at least not until Starfleet hears about the incident and sends another vessel to investigate.

Once they settle into the village, Nexx offers the cadets food and water from the tribe's meager stores. Tricorder readings show both are safe for consumption. The Aldosian leader then tells the cadets the story of how the Cardassians first arrived on Aldos II. He says the invaders arrived a little over two weeks ago. They attacked and captured the Federation science outpost, turning it into their base of operations.

They proceeded to attack and capture many of Nexx's people, putting them and the Federation scientists to work in the caves near the science station. The Cardassians force

them to mine a type of crystal growing there. Nexx wears a small piece of the crystal on a leather thong around his neck. A Routine (4) Personal Equipment (Tricorder) Test identifies it as dilithium. It appears the Cardassians are operating an illegal dilithium mine. Aldos II would also make an excellent launching point for a new offensive into Federation space.

Nexx tells the cadets that whatever the Cardassians are doing, they appear nearly finished. They've almost mined out all the crystal deposits in the caves and have started making preparations to leave. A Moderate (5) Strategic Operations Test tells the cadets the Cardassians would likely destroy all traces of their presence on Aldos II, including the science station and the enslaved Aldosians, before they depart.

Act Three: The Cardassian Base

In this act the cadets, with the aid of their Aldosian allies, must infiltrate a secret Cardassian base and find some means of escaping and warning Starfleet.

SCOUTING THE BASE

The Federation research station stands above the Aldosian jungle on the slope of a fairly steep mountainside. Only a portion of the mostly underground facility appears above ground on the side of the mountain. This gives the station a clear view of the surrounding jungle area. The small complex contains a few labs, an observation post, and quarters for the crew. The Cardassians transformed the station into a combination command center and dilithium refinery. Armed Cardassian guards patrol everywhere, and Gul Givar maintains his quarters in the facility.

The Aldosians know of caves and tunnels riddling the mountainside around the complex. The Cardassians' forced labor crews mine dilithium crystals from deep within these caverns. They load the crystals into small antigrav carriers, then push them along a narrow trail to the science station, where they unload the crystals, process them, and then ship them to the Cardassian warship in orbit. Cardassian guards keep a close eye on the labor crews as they work. A total of fifteen Cardassians (including Gul Givar) supervises and guards station operations. Eight members of the Federation science team and forty Aldosian workers labor at the facility.

A plateau above the science station serves as a landing facility for Cardassian shuttles, which bring personnel down to the planet and carry processed dilithium back to the warship. Two shuttles stay on the surface at all times, each similar in configuration to Type 6 Federation shuttlecraft (*Star Trek: TNG* rulebook, page 221). The shuttles sport low-yield plasma banks (similar to the *Galor*-class plasma banks, but inflicting only 10 points of damage) and use shields for protection.

The cadets can learn most of this information by talking with the Aldosians in Nexx's village and by scouting out the base for themselves. Nexx offers to go with a scouting party, accompanied by two more Aldosian hunters. Ask the players for Stealth Tests as their characters move closer to the base. A failed test

might result in a Cardassian guard becoming suspicious, wandering perilously close to the cadets as they hide in the jungle, looking around a bit, then wandering back to his post.

If the cadets do anything to give away their presence, the Cardassians try to capture them with weapons set on stun. Gul Givar interrogates captured characters to discover how much they know about the Cardassians' plans before sending the prisoners to work with the rest of the labor force. Captured cadets have a difficult time overpowering the Cardassians and escaping, but give any reasonable plan the players devise a fair chance of succeeding.

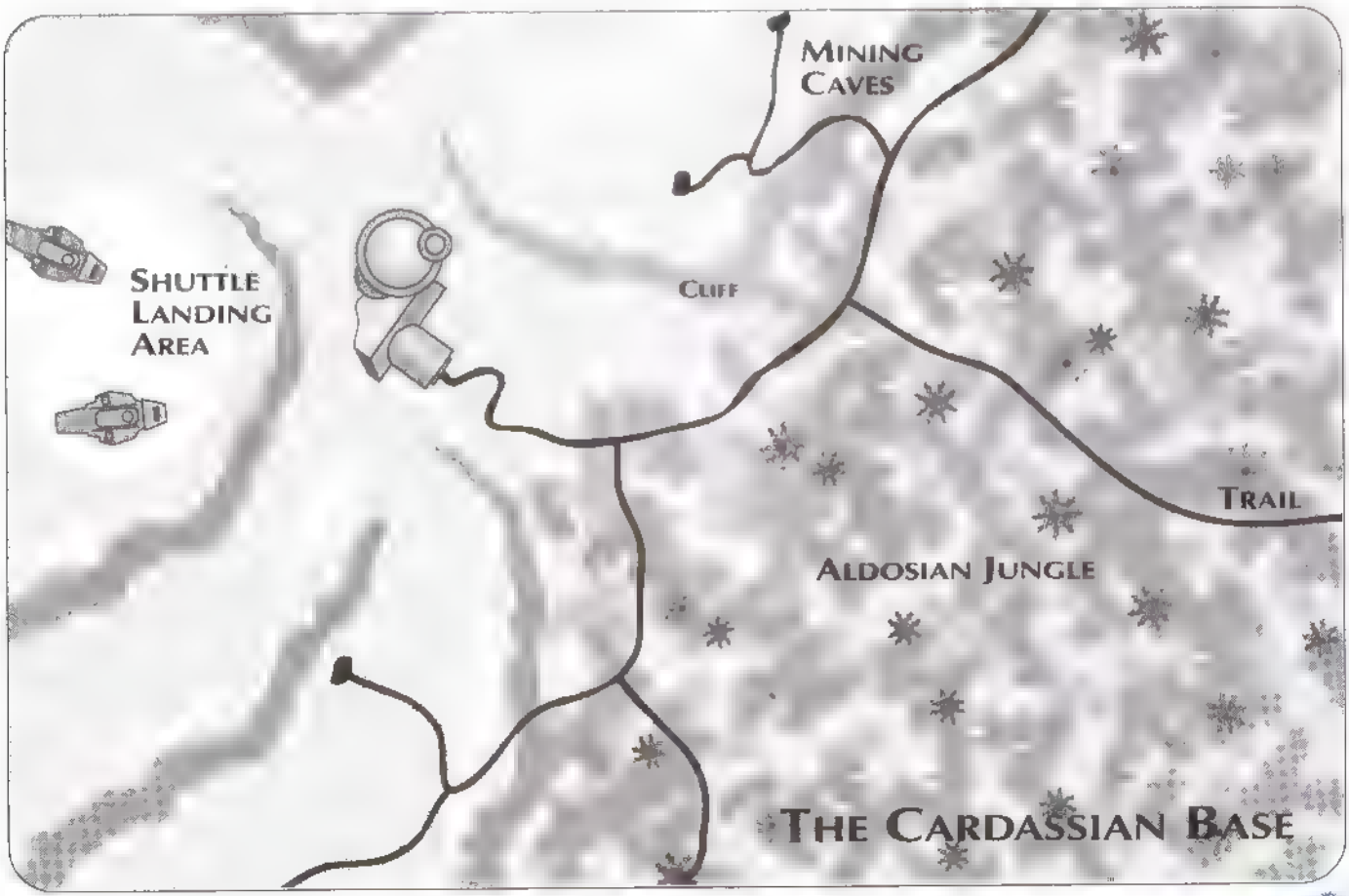
PLAN OF ATTACK

The players determine how the cadets proceed from here. They might try several approaches to overcome the Cardassians and help their prisoners. Use the information below as a guideline, and improvise if the players come up with a particularly innovative plan. Nexx and his people do whatever they can to aid the Crew, short of sacrificing themselves for them. They want the Cardassians off their planet at least as much as the cadets want to liberate the camp.

Sneak Attack

The cadets might try to stage a commando-style raid on the outpost, taking the Cardassians by surprise enough to overpower some of them and gain control of the base. Although the Cardassians outnumber the cadets and have better weapons, the Crew members have the element of surprise on their side. If they can reach the base and avoid detection, they might pick off several Cardassian guards before anyone notices anything amiss. The best route of attack is trying to infiltrate the base late at night and taking out the guards long enough to gain control (a Challenging (10) Planetary Tactics Test).

To reach the base, the Crew must make Stealth Tests as they make their way through the jungle, as well as Athletics (Climbing) Tests



to scale the mountainside to the base. A Challenging (9) Security Systems Test gets the Crew past the electronic security outside the base, giving them access inside. After more Stealth Tests to avoid the notice of the Cardassians inside the base, the Crew can begin disabling guards.

The Crew might try combining a sneak attack with one or more other options, hoping to confuse the Cardassians about their real objective.

Distraction

The Crew might ask the Aldosians to help stage some distraction to draw the Cardassians' attention away from the base, giving the cadets time to carry out their own plan. The Aldosian hunters go along with any reasonable plan the cadets propose. The characters or Aldosians might suggest some possible distractions:

- *A group of Aldosians could stage an attack on the base or the mines, hoping to draw some of the Cardassian guards off when they begin to retreat back into the jungle.*
- *Using parts from tricorders and combadges, along with some native materials, the cadets might build a crude explosive device to draw the Cardassians' attention. This requires a Challenging (9) Demolitions Test.*
- *Aldosians could hurl rocks down at the Cardassians from higher up the mountain slope, or even trigger a small rockslide using sonic emissions from a modified combadge, requiring a Challenging (9) Personal Equipment (Communications) Test to rig.*

Any reasonable distraction draws the attention of most Cardassians at the base for a short while, giving the cadets a chance to carry out their plans.

Ambush a Patrol Shuttle

The Crew may try ambushing a Cardassian patrol outside the base, then use the patrol's shuttle to land at the base undetected and catch the Cardassians by surprise. This requires setting up a suitable ambush, probably with the Aldosians' help. The Crew can create some kind of incident likely to attack the Cardassians' attention, such as hailing the *Fearless* on an open channel and giving away their position. Or they might simply send a signal to the Cardassians, indicating they are willing to surrender and asking the Cardassians to come and get them. The Cardassians tend to underestimate the threat posed by a group of Starfleet cadets, so they send a shuttle out to collect them. This gives the Crew an opportunity for ambush.

Run the fight against the Cardassians normally. At the first sign of trouble, the Cardassian pilot attempts to take off in the shuttle, so the Crew must act quickly. The Cardassians stay alert for any signs of treachery and move to disarm the cadets as quickly as possible. Give the Crew a fair chance to overpower the Cardassians, but don't make it easy.

Kidnapping

The cadets might also try capturing Gul Givar to use him as a bargaining chip to force the Cardassians to surrender. Givar rarely leaves the confines of the science station, although he leaves to inspect his troops and the mining operation each morning. If the cadets managed to sneak into the base, they might reach Gul Givar's quarters and capture him. This requires a Challenging (10) Stealth Test. Cadets must also overcome the Cardassian guard on duty outside Givar's room without alerting Givar.

If the cadets capture Gul Givar, they find him stubborn and uncooperative. If he believes his life is in danger, however, he orders his men to stand down and even evacuate the station. He doubts a group of Federation children would harm him, but he cannot trust the Aldosians. Nexx's aggressive and vengeful attitude might convince Givar to cooperate.

For their part, the Cardassians react to their commander's capture by threatening to execute Federation and Aldosian hostages unless

they release Givar. The Crew must deal with some tense negotiations to make their plan work.

Stowing Away

The Crew might also try stowing aboard one of the Cardassian shuttles. They can then try to overpower the shuttle crew and use the shuttle to get help, or they can try sneaking aboard the Cardassian warship and sabotaging it in some way. The cadets can slip on board a shuttle with a Challenging (10) Stealth Test. Lower the difficulty if the cadets arrange some distraction for the Cardassians. They can also rig a tricorder to help shield them from detection by Cardassian sensors with a Challenging (9) Systems Engineering Test.

If the Crew manage to take over a shuttle and escape the planet, they complete the test. If they sneak on board the Cardassian warship, you can end the test there or improvise some additional scenes where the Crew works to sabotage the Cardassians' systems.

Escape

The test ends once the cadets manage to take control of the Federation base or get off the planet. A voice says, "Computer, freeze program," and everything comes to a complete stop. An arch appears and the doors open to reveal Commander Zakarian, completely uninjured and smiling broadly if the cadets have done well. "Congratulations, cadets," he tells them. "You've passed your planetary survival test with flying colors. End program." The backdrop of the planet, ship, or shuttle fades away, replaced by the familiar grid of the holodeck on board the *Fearless*.

Epilogue

Commander Zakarian explains the nature of the test and goes over the cadets' performance with them. If the characters came up with particularly original ideas, Zakarian praises them, although he always points out when the cadets strayed from Starfleet procedure. If the cadets made any mistakes, the Commander points them out as well, and asks the cadets to explain their actions and how they might have done things differently. Give the players a chance to analyze their own performance during the episode. The cadets should learn from their experience, and Zakarian gives them every opportunity to do so.

After their debriefing and review, Commander Zakarian offers the cadets a day's shore leave seeing the real beauty of Aldos II, with him as their guide. They visit the Federation science station and have a chance to relax in a tropical paradise before heading back to the Academy.

Awards

Use the following guidelines for assigning character rewards for this episode.

Development Points

- Cadets completed the test successfully: +1.
- Cadets completed the test very successfully: +1.
- Cadets completed the test, but did so in an improper manner: –1.
- Cadets failed to complete the test, but learned from the experience: +1.
- Players roleplayed characters very well: +1.
- Players roleplayed characters poorly: –1.

Renown

Characters should receive Renown Points for this episode only if they did something particularly outstanding that Commander Zakarian sees fit to include in their record. For example, if the cadets figure out the test is only a simulation and they manage to override the holodeck to "win," they should receive 1–2 Initiative Renown points. Other especially innovative ideas should earn the cadets 1 or 2 Initiative or Skill Renown points.

If you decide to run this episode as a real event and not a simulation, the cadets have considerably greater opportunities for earning

Renown. Making successful first contact with the Aldosians is worth +2 Openness. Overcoming the Cardassians and saving the Federation science station against overwhelming odds is a feat worthy of a commendation such as the Kragite Order of Heroism (*Star Trek: TNG* rulebook, page 181). If you introduce additional complications into the episode, feel free to increase the Renown awards accordingly, but remember that cadets who undergo this episode as a real event may become some of the most well known members of their entire class!

Against the backdrop of classes, exams, and the forthcoming Sadie Hawkins Dance, a mysterious disease breaks out at Starfleet Academy, leaving its victims temporarily paralyzed and weakened. As the Crew members race against the clock to find a cause for the disease (and get dates for the dance), they discover a malevolent energy being brought to campus in an alien archaeological artifact. They must track down and study this lifeform in an effort to end its depredations and find a cure for the disease. When they finally discover the information they seek, the cadets must engage in one final, dangerous encounter with the being, who takes over the body of one of their favorite professors. Assuming they emerge victorious, they must face one final menace—the dance itself.

SUMMARY

"The Medusa Syndrome" is a *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* scenario set at Starfleet Academy. The player characters run students at the Academy who get involved in a situation in an effort to help their classmates—and of course to satisfy their desire for excitement and adventure (investigating a mystery is certainly more intriguing than studying) and their unquenchable curiosity.

The episode takes place in autumn, during the time leading up to the annual Sadie Hawkins Dance at the Academy (which occurs in early November). The dance, a long-standing Academy custom, turns the social tables by requiring women to ask men to the dance. The social interaction related to the dance can seem humorously awkward, and forms a subplot which the Narrator can use as he sees fit.

The return to campus of Professor Axander Moltros, a Centauran archaeologist who teaches at the Academy, sets the events of the episode in motion. He's spent the better part of the past year directing an archaeological dig on Digrala III, where ruins indicate a once-powerful civilization existed. After months of intriguing discoveries, he's returned with a *pièce de résistance*: a Digralan *omphalos*, an item of enormous cultural significance for the Digralans. He plans to display the *omphalos*, and several other choice artifacts, at the Academy while he studies them.

Unknown to Professor Moltros, the omphalos holds more than cultural significance. An alien energy being of great power and seemingly great malevolence has lived inside it for years—trapped there perhaps by the decline of the Digralan civilization and thus a lack of sustenance. Now that Professor Moltros has brought its "house" to a place with plenty of corporeal beings for it to "feed" off of, it fully awakens and begins to make up for lost time.

The first hint of trouble on campus occurs when a student—perhaps a Crew member—wakes up one morning unable to move! Her neurological functions appear highly abnormal; somehow an unusual enzyme has infiltrated her system, rendering her partially paralyzed. Naturally this terrifies her; fortunately, medical officers indicate her condition is temporary. Sure enough, after a few days the enzyme disappears from her system and she recovers the use of her limbs.

That's not the last of this strange incident. Other students, all women, experience the same malady. The situation baffles doctors, who can't figure out how the enzyme enters the body or exactly how it affects the nervous system's functions. Wild rumors sweep the campus about what's going on and what's about to happen.

This situation attracts the Crew members' attention, particularly if the disease affects one of their number, and they begin to investigate. They can talk to the doctors, scan the campus with tricorders, or interview subsequent victims. Sooner or later, though, their investigation leads them back to the *omphalos*. When they begin scanning it, the energy being flees.

If the Crew members think they've chased the threat away, they're in for a rude awakening. The day after they discover it exists, the being attacks another student, but in a much more brutal fashion. The lifeform raises the

odds, and the Crew must respond in kind. Armed with what they've already learned and working with additional data gained from the latest attacks, they can direct their investigation down new, more profitable paths. They eventually find a way to track the creature, confront it, and discover its weaknesses. As they press their investigation, the being attacks them, but they obtain the data they need to defeat it once and for all.

Using the latest information, the Crew members construct a weapon, device, or trap to capture or destroy the creature. A final, dangerous confrontation follows, from which the Crew should emerge triumphant if they've done their background work well. Now all they must worry about is the Sadie Hawkins Dance.

Act One: Arrival

The Sadie Hawkins Dance

Late autumn in San Francisco: An invigorating crispness sharpens the air, and some leaves have turned to red and orange and gold. Unfortunately for the students at Starfleet Academy, classes and exams continue as always; cadets have little time to casually walk through the grounds or simply sit back and enjoy the time of year. All is not bleak, though: The arrival of fall signals the approach of certain Academy events—most notably the Sadie Hawkins Dance.

An Academy tradition from its very early years, the Sadie Hawkins Dance takes place in early November. Unlike similar social occasions which typically involve male students asking female students to attend the dance, the Sadie Hawkins Dance requires the women to ask the men out. While this poses no problem for most female cadets, the role reversal seems a little awkward for more than a few women and men, and sometimes lead to problems. Still, in the end, everyone usually has a good time.

But classes and the forthcoming dance aren't the main topic of conversation among students these days. The latest buzz concerns Professor Axander Moltros, who's returned from an extended expedition to Digrala III with fabulous relics and treasures (or so the rumors say). Practically everyone on campus plans to attend his lecture, where he promises to unveil his discoveries.

The Lecture

Professor Moltros' lecture allows Narrators to inject some roleplaying into the early parts of the scenario—perhaps even the chance for female characters to ask someone to the Sadie Hawkins Dance. Since almost everyone on campus attends, the Crew could bump into just about anyone: favorite (or not so favorite) professors, rival students, perhaps even the Academy Superintendent or important personnel from Starfleet Command.

Professor Moltros is handsome, vivacious, and gregarious and gives an excellent presen-

OTHER SERIES

Even if you're not running a series set at Starfleet Academy, you can still use "The Medusa Syndrome" mostly as it's written. Of course, this means ignoring the Sadie Hawkins subplot, and perhaps other student-oriented subplots as well.

Standard *Star Trek: TNG* Crew (and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Roleplaying Game* Crew members who belong to Starfleet) can take part in this episode when they return to the Academy for a visit—for example, to attend a reunion, give a guest lecture or participate in some sort of seminar, or brief Starfleet Command personally on the latest developments in the Dominion War (or its aftermath). When one of them, or a shipmate, becomes stricken with the "illness," they look into the matter in an effort to help him.

Of course, you don't have to set the episode at the Academy at all if you don't want to. Crews from any part of the *Star Trek* universe might encounter the Digralan energy being: at an isolated archaeological site on Digrala III, on some far-off space station, or even aboard a starship. By isolating the Crew and some NPC's with the being, you can heighten the tension in the episode.

Narrators who want to use "The Medusa Syndrome" in *Star Trek: The Original Series Roleplaying Game* series might develop the potential relationship between the Digralan energy being and the energy beings depicted in the episodes "Wolf in the Fold" and "Day of the Dove." All of them are noncorporeal entities who subsist at least in part, on humanoid emotions (including fear and hatred). Perhaps the Digralan energy being belongs to the same species, or to a related species—or maybe it's "redjac" itself (it recovered from being beamed into outer space by hiding inside the Digralan omphalos for decades). The latter option may necessitate some changes in the scenario (instead of paralyzing its victims, the being might take control of Professor Moltros' body to terrorize and kill female students).

tation. He makes an otherwise boring lecture about an archaeology dig come alive with personal anecdotes, observations, and tales of camp life. One by one, he shows the audience the Digralan artifacts he has recovered. Since he presents evidence suggesting a connection between the Digralan civilization and the Iconians, interest in the professor's work runs high.

Finally, only one object—the largest one in the center of the stage—remains to be unveiled. With a flourish the Professor pulls off the cover to reveal a statuette just under one meter tall. It depicts a seated humanoid figure with exaggerated, rounded features, including a greatly enlarged head and what looks like a navel. Due to wear and tear on the object—which the professor estimates is thousands of years old—its facial features have worn down, but they seem to resemble those of humans.

Professor Moltros describes this object as a "Digralan *omphalos*." He say it seems to have held extreme religious significance. Found in the ruins of a major temple, it may even have marked the very center of the Digralan world or universe. The text inscribed on tablets found near the *omphalos* will, when finally translated, undoubtedly shed more light on its meaning and import.

Professor Moltros hosts a reception after the lecture, which the Crew members may attend if they wish. There they can get a closer look at the *omphalos*, and perhaps talk to Professor Moltros himself. A character who displays sufficient archaeological acumen may even attract the Professor's attention and receive an invitation to join his next expedition as a field study. Any female character with a positive Psi attribute, or an Intellect of 4 or higher, who examines the *omphalos* closely feels strangely lightheaded.

PROFESSOR AXANDER MOLTROS

Professor Axander Moltros is an outgoing and friendly archaeologist with extensive field experience. He's conducted digs on many planets, lectured before the Daystrom Institute, and made many important finds. He currently holds a professorship at Starfleet Academy, though he spends at least half of every year on digs throughout the Alpha Quadrant.

Like most of his race, members of the opposite sex regard Professor Moltros as attractive and appealing. His arrogance manifests itself as an inability to talk about any given subject and not show off how much he knows about it, rather than a supercilious intellectual oneupsmanship.

Attributes

Fitness: 2
Coordination: 2
Intellect: 3
  Logic +1
  Perception +1
Presence: 3
  Empathy +1
Psi: 0

Skills

Administration (Archaeological Teams) 2 (3)
Artistic Expression (Painting) 2 (3)
Charm (Influence) 2 (3)

Culture (Centauran) 2 (3)
(Human) (2)
First Aid (Centauran) 1 (2)
History (Centauran) 1 (2)
Languages
Centauran 2
Federation Standard 2
Personal Equipment (Tricorder) 1 (2)
Persuasion (Oratory) 2 (3)
Planetary Sciences (Geology) 2 (3)
Planetside Survival (Desert) 2 (3)
Social Sciences (Anthropology) 3 (4)
(Archaeology) (4)
Vehicle Operation (Shuttlecraft) 1 (2)
World Knowledge (Alpha Centauri) 1 (2)
(Digrala III) (2)
(Earth) (2)

Advantages/Disadvantages

Sexy +2, Arrogant –1

Courage: 3
Renown: 12
Aggression: 1 **Discipline:** 0
Initiative: 3 **Openness:** 3 **Skill:** 5

Resistance: 2
Wound Levels: 2/2/2/2/2/2/0

PARALYZED!

Following the lecture, life at the Academy returns to normal. But just a few days later, cadets rush one of their fellow students to the campus infirmary when she wakes up and cannot move! She can speak and turn her head, but her arms, legs, and torso appear completely paralyzed. Her health seems otherwise excellent; she felt fine the night before.

The Narrator may choose the identity of the energy being's first victim. It would make the game more dramatic and tense if the victim were a Crew member (assuming your group has any female characters), but that unfortunately prevents the cadet in question from participating in at least part of the investigation. Unless a player misses the game session (in which case you can paralyze her character without any difficulty), it probably works best to make the first victim an NPC who's close to the Crew—a good friend or significant other, for example. (See below for some suggested names for victims.)

SUBPLOTS

Experienced Narrators may wish to include a subplot or two as part of this episode. Since the events don't occur in immediate succession, characters can pursue other interests and activities in the time between them.

The forthcoming Sadie Hawkins Dance serves as the primary subplot referred to throughout this episode. Female characters must find dates. Male characters want someone (perhaps a specific someone) to ask them to attend. While attendance at the dance isn't mandatory, it's one of the highlights of the Academy's social scene. Not making an appearance would mark the character as a loner, perhaps even a misanthrope—qualities not well regarded in Starfleet, whose members must get used to living and working together almost all the time. The Narrator can safely assume almost all NPC cadets want to go to the dance.

Asking someone to the dance presents the perfect chance for a character to express feelings she's been afraid to voice, or to take the opportunity to attract that special someone's attention. An NPC attempting to make another character jealous could cause all kinds of problems. A character may face the dilemma of agreeing to go to the dance with someone, only to have the person he really wants to go with ask just a day or two later. In contrast to the more serious main adventure, this subplot focuses on character interaction, roleplaying, and even humor. Draw on sitcoms and movies you've seen with similar plots for inspiration. Play the situation to the hilt and encourage the players to do the same.

You might use some other subplots in place of or in addition to the dance subplot:

- Science Project. One or more Crew members has trouble completing an acceptable class project for one of his science classes. The investigation of the energy creature during the main scenario may give him some ideas for one, or he may try turning the investigation itself into his project, with potentially disastrous results ("No! Don't shoot it! I need it for my biology class!").
- Dominion War. If your series takes place in the mid–2370's during the Dominion War, perhaps the energy being is really some sort of Dominion bioweapon designed to wreak havoc at the Academy and Starfleet Command, and the Dominion killed Professor Moltros and replaced him with a shapeshifter. As the Crew investigate the cases of paralysis, they stumble onto this and must deal with the consequences.

A medical examination of the victim shows an unusual, never-before-encountered enzyme has entered her body by unknown means. The enzyme somehow interferes with the ability to process certain nerve impulses throughout most of the body, causing paralysis. The condition is not painful or immediately threatening. The doctors predict the victim should return to normal in a few days as

DIGRALA III

The only Class M planet orbiting the star Digrala, Digrala III is a barren, windswept world barely capable of supporting life. Geological signs indicate it was once a much friendlier, more lush world, but that a catastrophe about 10,000 years ago reduced it to its present state.

Ruins litter the surface of Digrala III. Millennia of dirt and dust have buried some, while others lost their protective earthen covering when the planet's often harsh winds scoured it away. Archaeological investigations indicate a once-proud civilization with significant technological prowess lived here. The causes of its destruction or disappearance are, as yet, unknown, as is the extent of any connection between those causes and the ecological disaster 10,000 years ago.

Explorers discovered Digrala III in 2367; archaeological investigations began there about nine months ago. Preliminary data seem to indicate a connection between the Digralans and the Iconians; they may even have been Iconians. Starfleet continues following the investigation with great interest, and makes sure a powerful starship or two in the vicinity of the planet can protect the archaeologists if necessary.

the body's natural immune processes clear out the enzyme.

Since the Crew has some connection to the victim, they undoubtedly want to visit their sick comrade. Since she retains her ability to speak, you can roleplay this part of the scene with them. She describes how terrifying it was to wake up and be unable to move. Yet even when frightened, she felt very fatigued, as if she hadn't really slept at all.

WHAT'S HAPPENED

An energy being living inside the Digralan *omphalos* paralyzed the cadet. This being (also called a medusa wisp) feeds on humanoid emotions and life energies. At some unknown time in the past, it fled to Digrala III (or was left there by the inhabitants when they disappeared). Deprived of a food source, it entered an advanced state of hibernation inside the *omphalos*. The archaeological team's scans could not detect it in this dormant state. It slowly began to awaken and leeched off tiny amounts of their life energy—not enough to arouse suspicion, but enough to regain its strength.

Now that Professor Moltros has carried it to Earth, a highly populated planet, the energy being begins gorging itself, caring nothing for the harm it wreaks. The medusa wisp exhibits a predator's cunning, not true malevolence, since it's more beast than sentient entity.

The first victim cannot satisfy the energy being's need for emotions. Over the next few nights more female cadets wake up to find themselves paralyzed and exhausted. The campus doctors begin treating it as an epidemic and attempt to isolate a source while simultaneously developing a treatment.

INVESTIGATION

Now the Crew must start taking a little control over the situation. Spurred on by their affection for their fellow cadets—not to mention the general curiosity and sense of adventure which no doubt sets them apart from their Academy classmates—they begin investigating the situation. The characters can track down the information they seek in several ways: scan the campus and environs with tricorders, assist with the medical investigation, talk to Professor Moltros, and interview the victims themselves.

Remember, Crew members can't devote huge portions of time to their investigation. They must attend classes, finish projects, and take exams. This isn't like a 20th-century college where no one's going to make them go to class or do their homework. Starfleet Academy is a military school, and characters who miss even a single class or fail to submit a single assignment without a very good excuse are disciplined. If they keep it up, they might even earn negative Discipline Renown points. The investigation should take them days or weeks, which gives you the perfect opportunity to up the ante with more victims (see Act Two), bring out the dance subplot, or otherwise complicate matters.

Scanning

Scanning the campus for signs of anything abnormal seems the obvious first step in the investigation. While the characters can't access ship sensor arrays, they can obtain standard tricorders for their studies. Scanning in this manner takes a long time. The short-range scans the characters must use limit the

effective tricorder range to 25 meters. The large campus contains elements that interfere with scans—all those people walking around campus makes it harder to scan for life signs. Two or more characters who split up and start quartering the campus have a better chance of success.

Ordinarily cadets wouldn't have trouble reading the energy signatures left by an alien like the medusa wisp. Unfortunately for the characters, the wisp's energy signature is relatively similar to that of most standard Federation electronic equipment—tricorders, holocameras, PADD's, and combadges. Every time someone crosses the wisp's trail carrying one of those items, it muddles the trail.

Picking up the energy trail requires a Challenging (11) Personal Equipment (Tricorder) Test. Examining the entire campus this way takes about six hours for one to two people. For every additional person scanning beyond two, decrease the time by an hour, to a minimum of three hours. If more than one character tries to scan, they can make a Combined Test instead of three individual Tests.

Success on the Test means one of them detects an unusual bioenergy trail. The twisting, turning trails run from the *omphalos* to the places where the medusa wisp attacked the various victims; each trail typically lasts several hundred meters. Every 50 meters the character must make a Moderate (8) Personal Equipment (Tricorder) Test to keep following the trail. Failure means he's lost the trail and must try picking it back up again, this time at only a Challenging (9) Difficulty, since he has some idea of where to start looking.

Failure on the basic Test means either the character found nothing out of the ordinary, or he mistook someone else's tricorder or PADD "trail" for an anomaly. Dramatic Failure definitely results in the latter situation. You should play the situation for humor as the characters track some unsuspecting professor, cadet, or visiting lecturer back to his quarters and accuse him of being an alien life leech.

The characters may associate the arrival of the Digralan *omphalos* with the beginning of the paralysis attacks. If they specifically scan the *omphalos*, they may make a separate Moderate (6) Personal Equipment (Tricorder) Test. That tells them the *omphalos* emits some kind of odd energy. With a Moderate (8) Test they can follow the tendrils of energy to the locations where the medusa wisp attacked its victims. The readings on the *omphalos* seem somewhat odd, though. They resemble the

MEDUSA WISP (DIGRALAN ENERGY BEING)

Type: Pouncing Hunter

Size: Approximately 30 cm in diameter; weightless

Form: An orb of reddish-orange, semitranslucent energy

Attributes: Fitness 2, Coordination 4, Presence 3, Instinct 4

Base Movement: Flight 10/30

Resistance: 4 (see below)

Special Abilities/Unusual Skills: Intangibility, Life Force Leeching (4), Paralysis,and Possession (see below).

Weapons: None

Description and Additional Notes: The medusa wisp is a semi intelligent creature of pure energy. It subsists on humanoid life force, which it can drain directly, or by moving close to a humanoid experiencing strong negative emotions such as fear and hatred. Its red-orange coloration varies in brightness depending on how much life energy it has absorbed recently (throughout most of this episode it seems quite bright). It usually attacks females, who in its experience exhibit stronger emotions than men. In this particular situation, it chooses women who are already experiencing the negative emotions of worrying about the forthcoming Sadie Hawkins Dance.

The Medusa Wisp can pass through walls and other solid objects. It cannot be damaged by physical attacks, and takes only half damage from phasers and other energy weapons, which only stun without injuring or killing it.

With its Life Force Leeching skill (based on Coordination) it can drain life force, causing 2d6 damage if it touches the victim or 1/2d6 at a range of up to 5 meters (Resistance offers no protection against this attack) Alternatively, the being can feed near strong emotions; if angry or frightened characters attack it and come within 5 meters, increase its Resistance and Fitness by 1 per emotional person.

When near an unresisting victim (such as a sleeping person), the medusa wisp can induce paralysis by causing the body to produce enzymes which interfere with the body's nervous system. It then remains in the vicinity to feed off the victim's fear when it awakens and cannot move

The medusa wisp can enter a corporeal body and take control of it for a period of 1d6 hours. If the victim has a positive Willpower edge, the energy being cannot control him for more than three hours, the same applies to anyone who succeeds with a Challenging (9) Presence Test (modified by Willpower). After the possession, which causes the pupils to take on a distinctive red-orange color, ends, the victim does not remember what happened (he has "lost" those hours)

TROUBLESHOOTING: BETTER SENSORS

In some series the Crew may have access to better scanners than ordinary tricorders. Depending upon the circumstances (for example, if they have an appropriate Ally or Patron, or belong to an elite Squadron), they may even wrangle time at some starship's sensor array. If they're clever enough to obtain such a resource, let them use it. Reduce the Difficulties of all scanning Tests described above by 2 to reflect the superiority of such equipment.

A similar problem arises if the characters succeed with several scanning Tests quickly. That gives them the opportunity to short-circuit this part of the episode. You can allow them to jump straight into later scenes (confronting the medusa wisp) if you like, or you can find a way to delay them so the other characters can follow their investigative paths to the proper conclusions. For example, a Rival might harass a character, a professor could call a cadet on the carpet about an assignment he did not complete satisfactorily, or a potential dance date might ask a character out for coffee. Prepare a few possible delaying tactics in advance and think on your feet and you should have little trouble heading the characters off at the pass for a while if you must.

energy emitted by some Federation scanning equipment, and may simply reflect residual energy of scans performed by Professor Moltros or the other archaeologists.

If any characters possess empathic abilities, they can use those to scan as well. Since the energy being subsists in part on emotional energy, traces of the emotional outbursts its activities cause linger where it fed. A Moderate (6) Receptive Empathy Test performed within 25 meters of an attack scene reveals that something artificially prompted the emotions and then "milked" them in some inexplicable fashion. Discovering this may cause the empathic character pain. For every round in which he continues scanning the pockets of intense emotional residue, he must make a Moderate (6) Fitness Test. Failure indicates he takes 1d6 Stun Damage from the backwash of negative emotional energy and loses contact with the energy. Once he recovers the character may later make another Test to relocate the energy.

Medical Tests

Characters with a bent for medicine may focus their investigation on the physical nature of the victims themselves. The doctors responsible for the victims won't let just anyone look at them, though. The character must show a proven level of ability in an appropriate medical discipline and have good reason to see the patient. For example, a Starfleet Medical Academy student probably knows the doctors and can ask to see the patients "for learning purposes;" an engineer won't have it so easy. Assuming the characters knew one of the victims, they can claim they just want to visit their friend and cheer her up for a while. If they don't really know the victim, the characters might get into trouble—the victims can still speak and might shout for help if the visitors become too disruptive or annoying.

Any character who can obtain the doctors' findings can review them. A medical student examining the case could do this easily. Other characters must make Challenging (9) Computer (Computer Alteration/Hacking) Tests to break into the infirmary's computer system—which could easily result in their expulsion if someone catches them. Characters without the Medical Sciences skill find reading the notes difficult, since the doctors wrote them in authentic medical jargon—this delays their investigation considerably.

The records reveal each victim suffered similar effects. A previously unknown enzyme somehow entered the victims' bodies, hindering the nervous system's ability to process certain nerve impulses. Tests also show evidence of unusual neurochemical activity within the brain, including the lingering effects of a spike in the victim's serotonin levels (occurring from the onrush of intense fear the medusa wisp induced). The effects last several days, depending on physiology and metabolism (for example, Vulcans and Ferengi recover more quickly than humans and most other humanoids).

In short, the cadets don't find much to go on here. The characters learn these symptoms, and the enzyme, bear no relation to anything known to Federation science. This should tell the cadets they face something of alien origin.

Professor Moltros

If the characters make the *omphalos* connection, they probably want to talk to Professor Moltros. He gladly meets with them, but with all the attention currently focused on

him and his discoveries, he can't clear space in his schedule for several days unless the characters make a Moderate (8) Persuasion (any specialization) Test to convince him of the seriousness of their request.

The meeting with Professor Moltros presents an excellent opportunity for some roleplaying. Instead of resolving the matter with Skill Tests, let the players ask questions in their roles as Academy cadets, while you respond as the professor. Only if the players become absolutely stumped should you let them attempt Intellect Tests (or other appropriate Tests) to ask the right questions.

Depending on the questions they ask, they may learn some or all of the following information:

- *Moltros cannot prove the Digralans had psionic powers, but it's certainly possible. Some scholars believe advanced technology like that possessed by the Iconians and possibly the Digralans operates on some as-yet-unknown psionic basis, although the expedition discovered no Digralan technology.*
- *The Professor discovered the* omphalos *beneath the ruins of a large rectangular structure he believes served as the chief Digralan temple or holy site. Its survival was miraculous—collapsing beams from the building's ceiling fell in just the right way to shelter it from other debris. (This is a red herring; it was, indeed, sheer luck.)*
- *The other major artifacts recovered during the expedition are mostly non-religious in nature. They include household objects similar to smoking pipes, crockery made of an incredibly tough but lightweight stonelike material, some blade weapons, and objects the professor believes functioned as highly advanced (but burned out) information storage and retrieval units. (Anyone who attended his lecture saw these items from afar; he can give the characters a closer view if they want.)*
- *A few members of his expedition still remain on the planet, but for the most part work there has shut down until he returns with new workers in about six months.*
- *The expedition itself was a textbook example of how to conduct an archaeological dig, despite two small difficulties. Soon after the expedition arrived, a storm destroyed part of their supplies. The team also suffered from a minor flulike disease which did not respond to standard treatments. The professor suspects some virus undetectable by normal medical scans caused the problem. He himself never came down with the disease. (It wasn't a disease, but the newly awakened medusa wisp. Since it woke up very weak, the wisp drained only small amounts of life force from expedition members to help regain its strength, causing them to feel fatigued and ill.)*

If the characters think to scan Moltros (either surreptitiously or with his permission), they find his bioreadings unusual—very similar in some ways to the energy trails they (or other characters) have followed around campus. This may make them suspect he is responsible for the attacks; feel free to encourage this paranoia. His close proximity to the *omphalos* for so long caused long-term (but temporary and harmless) alterations in his medical readings. The same applies to a lesser degree to other expedition members, should the characters seek them out.

Interviewing the Victims

The characters may decide to interview the victims, who include Genevieve duChamp, a human; Loraleth, an Andorian; Arsula Roveen, a Centauran; and Beneeta Charleston, a human. The first victim (if not a Crew member) has already recovered. The others still remain in the Academy infirmary in various stages of paralysis. All of them talk to the Crew members, although the Crew must first find some way past the infirmary doctors (see "Medical Tests" above). The characters notice the attacks upset the victims tremendously, despite their current attempts at composure.

Roleplay these encounters without resorting to dice rolls. By asking the proper questions, the Crew members learn the victims had several things in common:

- *All victims exhibit temperamental attitudes. The attacks obviously angered and frustrated them. (The medusa wisp deliberately chose victims who emote strongly; they "taste" better.)*
- *All of them attended Moltros' lecture, or viewed the* omphalos *at some point. One or two of them may even work with the professor as interns. (The wisp chose victims it had previously "examined" for suitability.)*
- *None of them have dates for the Sadie Hawkins Dance yet. Each victim seems attractive in her own way (feel free to encourage a romance with male Crew members if you like). They each express some reason for not finding a date: feeling too shy to go, avoiding fancy social functions, not having the time to ask anyone, studying too hard to work the dance into their schedule, or suffering from heartbreak because their first choice turned them down. Though none admits this openly, not having a date upsets them, even those who claim not to care about the whole affair. (The wisp chose victims who were already emotionally vulnerable and thus "easy pickings.")*

With this information in mind, the characters can begin keeping an eye on other potential victims. Once they nail down a way to track the creature (or if they've already learned that; see below), they can try stopping its attacks before they occur.

Act Two: Confrontation

Upping the Ante

By this point, the characters should have made definite progress toward tracking down the alien; in fact, they've probably uncovered the connection between the *omphalos* and the attacks (at least the fact that the strange energy readings focus on the artifact). They may try to stop the attacks by removing the *omphalos* from its storage place on the Academy grounds or by confining it in a force field. Unfortunately, the medusa wisp's strange energy form makes it impossible for them to confine it this way; it continues leaving its "home" in the evenings to seek victims. If they destroy the *omphalos* (which the Professor tries to prevent), the wisp finds another home (see below).

If the characters watch the *omphalos* at night, they notice the wisp leave after dark to go feed. It emits a distinctive reddish-orange color. Cadets can easily detect its more intense energy readings "in person"; however, its intangible form and ability to fly help it escape any pursuit or monitoring.

The wisp is cunning enough to know when it's been discovered. When pursuers get close to it, the creature ups the ante, increasing the severity of its attacks to obtain more energy for itself. The next victim after cadets track it to the *omphalos* suffers a much greater energy drain—one which leaves her not only paralyzed, but near death in a deep coma. From that point on, all victims experience such vicious attacks.

The wisp also finds a new home. With its renewed strength, the medusa wisp uses its ability to possess people to take over a prominent campus official and exist inside him.

IT WOULD HAVE WORKED, IF ...

The Crew members aren't the only ones investigating the "epidemic." Academy doctors, other officials, and possibly the Crew members' rivals look into these strange incidents, too. The Narrator can use this as a story complication: Academy authorities could order the cadets to stop poking around, letting other investigators recover certain evidence they refuse to share. Different groups might stumble over each other as they pursue the wisp.

On the other hand, if the characters play their cards right, they might team up with other investigators and make progress more quickly. It all depends on how the cadets deal with them—for example, are they respectful of the authorities and willing to tell what they already know? Reward good behavior with useful information or allies, punish troublesome characters by creating problems for them.

Choose someone the characters must interact with as the victim. Professor Moltros presents a good target, since the wisp "knows" him well. The wisp might possess one of the cadets' dates for the Sadie Hawkins Dance.

Using its powers of possession also increases the strength of the energy trails the wisp leaves behind, making it easier for the Crew members to track it. The Difficulty for finding its energy trails with tricorders becomes Moderate (6) at the very worst. The wisp makes sure it loses pursuing characters before approaching its new "home"—it's intelligent enough not to lead the characters right to whomever it possesses.

ATTACK

Events start moving much more quickly as the story reaches its midpoint. Now the characters must go on the offensive to capture or destroy the creature

First they must find the wisp for certain. Their efforts at scanning probably dwindle before they can definitely locate its new home. But they soon encounter the wisp's possessed host. Have them make Moderate (7) Intellect Tests, modified by Perception (they can use their Search skills instead, if they prefer). Any character who succeeds notices the pupils of the host's eyes have taken on an odd reddish-orange tint—the same color as the energy being!

If the characters indicate they know the wisp possesses the victim, or if the wisp becomes certain they know how to find it, it attacks them using its Life Force Leeching power to injure them. Then it flees into another body. The Crew might stumble through an odd chase scene as they run across campus, grabbing people and staring into their eyes, following the wisp from one body to the next Sooner or later it loses them, though; its powers allow it to move faster than the cadets

If the characters cleverly manage to encounter the victim without alerting the canny wisp, they can start following him. Within 1d6 hours they see the wisp leave this victim and find someone else to possess. They can keep tracking it this way until the wisp catches on and attacks them.

If possible, stage the attack where no one other than the Crew members witnesses it—Professor Moltros' office, for example. That allows you to keep Academy security and other officials from interfering with the rest of the scenario. If the attack becomes public, security hauls the Crew in to explain to the Superintendent what's going on. Unless they really flub the "interview," the Superintendent allows them to help Security bring the creature to ground.

A FATAL WEAKNESS

Although they're not likely to emerge victorious from their initial conflict with the medusa wisp, the characters should learn some crucial information. During the fight the creature's energy readings become strong enough to read easily on the tricorders. The characters can analyze this data to discover the wisp's vulnerabilities and find a way to counterattack.

The new energy readings provide the Crew with information about how to trap or destroy

the creature. When fully active, the wisp's readings bear some resemblance to certain readings from an active warp core. A field similar to a warp-core containment field might trap the wisp and its possessed victim. The cadets might harm or kill the creature by collapsing such a field in on itself. A tractor-beam-like weapon might also injure it.

Act Three: Conclusion

BUILDING THE BETTER WISP TRAP

One usually finds warp-core containment fields only on starships or in photon torpedoes. The characters must complete two objectives to obtain such a field.

The Crew members must first scrounge the necessary parts from various labs and storage depots, replicating some components to built this weapon. This provides the Narrator an opportunity to inject a little more tension into the scenario, as the cadets break into restricted areas and dodge security patrols to get parts they need.

The characters must assemble the parts to build the weapon, a process requiring a Challenging (9) Physical Sciences (Physics) Test; a Moderate (7) Propulsion Engineering (Warp Drive) Test; or a Systems Engineering Test with a Difficulty of Moderate (6) for the Force Fields specialization, or Challenging (9 or higher) for other specializations. If the characters determine some other plausible solution, set an appropriate Difficulty and let them give it a shot. They can also make a Combined or Extended Test to improve their chances of success.

If the characters work with the Academy authorities, these tasks become much easier. The cadets will have no need to sneak around and filch parts—they can simply request them—and they have the help of the Academy's finest engineers and scientists to make the device work as efficiently as possible. This option presents fewer challenges than the other one, a good reason to try to keep the characters working on their own as long as possible.

Meanwhile, the wisp steps up its attacks to gather energy for the final confrontation. Cadets find more and more victims paralyzed and comatose—perhaps even dead. Fear cripples the campus. The Superintendent considers canceling the Sadie Hawkins Dance. Try to work in the dance subplot so at least one character desperately wants the dance to go on (perhaps she's gotten her "dream date" to attend it with her) to place additional pressure on the characters.

TROUBLESHOOTING: WEAPONS

At this point the characters probably won't have any weapons to use against the wisp—Academy cadets aren't issued their own phasers. They may take steps to obtain some, such as breaking into Academy weapon lockers, an action which surely gets them tossed out of the Academy if they're caught. They might also try to jury-rig weapons of their own using spare parts from labs.

Using weapons against the creature at this stage isn't easy. They don't yet have enough information to know how to hurt it. They must also take care not to hurt the wisp's innocent hosts.

A phaser (or similar weapon) set on Stun causes the creature to flee its unconscious host for another. Damaging the host further has no effect on the wisp. Phasers used on the creature itself inflict only half damage, and can at most stun it (never killing or permanently injuring it).

BATTLE

With weapon in hand, the characters search for the energy being. You should make this as tense and exciting a scene as possible. If you can manage it, don't just let the cadets waltz right out, follow the energy trails to the wisp's current location, and attack it. Instead, the wisp keeps jumping from body to body in an effort to hide itself. If necessary, it changes or tries to diminish its energy signature so the characters must take further steps to find it again.

Once they corner the creature, though, it must fight. The wisp lashes out with its Life Force Leeching power, and maybe even tries to possess one of the characters. Let the intended victim make a Moderate (6) Presence Test (modified by Willpower) or Routine (4) Behavior Modification (Resistance) Test to prevent it from controlling him.

TROUBLESHOOTING: INFORMATION ON THE WISP

Of course, the characters only learn this information if they remember to keep a tricorder running during the fight, or delegate one character to stand back and gather information. If they forget this, you can still provide them with this data in one of several ways.

You might have each of them make an Intellect Test. The character with the best Test Result "remembered" to leave his tricorder running, or forgot to turn it off.

If the characters join forces with the authorities or another group of students, someone from that group happens upon the conflict and take tricorder readings.

An environmental sensor, such as a security monitor, somehow picks up the conflict. The characters must obtain the information by requesting it from the authorities or breaking into the appropriate databases.

The characters must bring their weapon to bear and capture or destroy the wisp—just driving it away isn't acceptable, since it would prey on others. Don't just make this a point-and-pull-the-trigger situation, though; complicate matters. Maybe the weapon malfunctions when they first use it, and they must make emergency field repairs before the creature harms one of them. Perhaps it doesn't work as well as they had hoped and they must use it multiple times. They might hesitate to use the weapon on the creature while it possesses someone's body, especially someone they know.

Eventually, though, they catch and possibly destroy the wisp. The miniature containment field surrounds the creature, diminishing its light as the cadets condense the field. They might transfer it to a better containment facility for study, or they could eliminate the being. Once the field collapses fully, the glow dims, then goes out, and the wisp disappears.

TROUBLESHOOTING: WHY DOESN'T THE WISP FLEE?

Characters may wonder why the wisp doesn't simply head for greener pastures once they discover it. The cadets might find the answer in energy readings taken on the *omphalos* and creature. The wisp's long habitation of the artifact "tied" it to that object. It doesn't want to leave the vicinity of its longtime home—especially in the midst of such a bountiful selection of food.

OFF TO THE DANCE

Assuming all goes well, the characters capture or dissipate the wisp. Readings from the final conflict may even provide data allowing doctors to cure more quickly the wisp's remaining victims of their lingering effects. Depending on exactly how they handled the whole episode, the cadets could receive praise as campus heroes, the unsung saviors of their classmates. The Superintendent might call them on the carpet to explain just what they've been doing to cause such havoc at the Academy. If they at least succeeded in catching or killing the wisp, and can prove it, they avoid expulsion from the Academy for any trouble or damage they caused along the way. In fact, they may even have positive notes or commendations entered into their permanent records.

Now they just have to make it to the Sadie Hawkins Dance on time. Crew members should finally get the courage to ask that special someone to attend with them, or have an

NPC, perhaps even one they rescued, ask them out, depending on their sex. You can even roleplay the dance if you want, allowing the characters to enjoy themselves in a social situation and revel in their fame as the ones who discovered and foiled the medusa wisp.

Awards

Use the following guidelines when assigning rewards for this episode

Development Points

- Cadets stopped the Medusa Wisp: +1
- Cadets successfully contained the Medusa Wisp: +1
- Cadets defeated the Medusa Wisp, but did so by improper means: -1
- Cadets stopped the Medusa Wisp in an innovative way: +1
- Players roleplayed their characters very well: +1
- Players roleplayed their characters poorly: -1
- Cadets got a date for the Sadie Hawkins Dance: Love is its own reward.

Renown

Cadets should receive Renown Points for this episode for successfully halting the depredations of the Medusa Wisp.

- The cadets violated the Academy Code of Conduct: -2 to –5 Discipline
- The cadets successfully contain the Medusa Wisp: +1 to +3 Skill
- The cadets complete the story independently (*i.e.*, without help from faculty): +1 to +3 Initiative.
- The cadets report their findings to the faculty, and ask for help: +1 Discipline

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